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112th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 26 July 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Deiss .... (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 27 (*continued*)

High-level Meeting on Youth

Social development

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Draft resolution (A/65/L.87)

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, who will make a statement along with a youth delegate.

Ms. Fries-Gaier (Germany): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany. Germany aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Ms. Fritze (Germany): Let me first take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the Government and people of Norway.

I will present two crucial points proclaimed by the youth living in Germany — first, full and effective youth participation, and secondly, the issue of migration and youth on the international agenda.

Over the past months, my colleague and I have travelled thousands of kilometres around our country to meet young people of various backgrounds. Many productive dialogues and discussions were held, enabling us to collect their visions, thoughts and beliefs.

Although dialogue is one of the topics of the International Year of Youth, we regret that the framework of the Year was not used to its fullest potential with regard to its long-term impact. This High-level Meeting is yet another meeting just about youth issues. However, the question remains: were young people really involved in the negotiations?

When focusing on the best interests of youth, as mentioned in the outcome document (resolution 65/312), politicians must involve young people as equal partners and key stakeholders at all levels. Therefore, youth participation means going beyond dialogue. It is the involvement of youth in the entire decision-making process, beginning with the definition of the relevant issues and ending with the implementation and evaluation of policies.

As a suitable instrument, I want to mention the productive process of what is called structured dialogue. This initiative was launched within the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field. Clear indicators help young people to make sure that the agreements between them and policymakers are followed up and monitored afterwards. However, measurable indicators are still missing in the World Programme of Action for Youth and should therefore be integrated.

One could also say that democracy is learning by doing. For example, participation starts in schools by nominating class representatives and in youth-led

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organizations by being in charge. Germany supports such initiatives by fostering sustainable initiatives for local, regional and national youth councils. Also, programmes for youth delegate at the United Nations are an efficient way to involve young people, and I urge all States to integrate those programmes.

Young people have the shared common potential, creativity and power to contribute to their societies. The biggest resource we have in this world is the developing skills of youth. Nevertheless, for some young people migration is a result of desperation, as seen in Eastern Africa. For that reason, I urge all Member States to integrate the issue of youth and migration into the United Nations agenda. Giving young people the opportunity to take over responsibilities, empowering them and letting them participate is not just an investment, it is a value in itself.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden, who will make a statement along with a youth representative.

Ms. Burgstaller (Sweden): Sweden welcomes the opportunity this High-level Meeting affords us to highlight the importance of investing in and empowering young women and men.

Sweden aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the European Union.

I will share the floor with the Swedish youth representative, Malin Johansson, who was appointed by the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations. She will make a statement in her personal capacity.

At the outset, I would like to join others in expressing our deepest sympathy to our neighbours in Norway after the horrendous events last Friday. Our thoughts are with them. Those acts of terror aimed at the Government and at young, engaged people were a direct attack on an open and democratic society. This is unacceptable, and we will stand in solidarity with our Norwegian friends to protect the values we so firmly believe in.

Young women and men, with their knowledge, experiences and engagement, can contribute immensely to peaceful and sustainable development. But not all young people have the same possibilities. Therefore, we need to strengthen our resolve to ensure full respect for the universal and inalienable rights of all young women and men, in all countries, to participation, to education, to decent work and to health.

I believe that this High-level Meeting has already shown that we are all prepared to work together with and for young people. Let us do that in a culture of dialogue and mutual understanding, and with the World Programme of Action for Youth as our point of departure.

Ms. Johansson (Sweden): My name is Malin Johansson. I have been elected as a youth representative by the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations.

I too want to express my deepest condolences and sympathy to our neighbours in Norway. My thoughts are with all the young people who were at Utøya and all the families and friends who lost a loved one.

Dialogue and mutual understanding must defeat ignorance and brutality. It feels more important than ever in a time like this. As a young person I very much welcome the theme of this High-level Meeting. Dialogue and mutual understanding are always key factors in moving forward.

At the same time, just talking is not enough. We need concrete action in order for progress to be made. Now it is up to the Members, the decision-makers, to prove that this is not just talk from their side and that they do intend to take concrete action. That means, among other things, implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly.

There has been some discussion about the Programme of Action in the negotiations on the outcome document of this Meeting. We firmly believe that the Programme is a very good basis to work from. Any future revision of the Programme must be preceded by a thorough evaluation of the Programme, in-depth dialogue with youth and youth organizations and sufficient time for discussions in and between Member States. However, until then, the implementation of the Programme must remain a priority for all Member States, as must the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

As previously mentioned, human rights are universal and apply to everyone, anywhere, at all times and without exceptions. Human rights must serve as a basis when developing youth policies.

A fundamental right is participation, which is something that is very close to my heart, as a young person with a disability. Many young people today, with or without disabilities, consistently face marginalization and exclusion. Everyone, regardless of disability, age, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex, gender identification or gender expression should have the same rights and the same opportunities to participate on equal terms. What is more, the participation of young people has to be real and not just symbolic.

Youth participation needs to permeate all levels of politics. Youth perspectives can be expressed only by young people themselves, and that is why youth-led organizations are essential in achieving youth participation. Youth-led organizations must therefore be strengthened and encouraged.

It is central that the work for young people's participation, influence and power does not stop at national borders. Young people, through youth organizations, must participate in, influence and hold power in international arenas as well.

That is why I regret that there are so few young people represented here today, especially since this is a conference on youth. We have the right to contribute with our full potential, creativity and strength here and now. Young people are no more the future than middle-aged people are the past.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Daniel Supplice, special representative of the President of Haiti.

Mr. Supplice (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): It is an honour to take the floor in my capacity as Special Adviser to the new President-elect of the Republic of Haiti, His Excellency Mr. Michel Joseph Martelly, and on behalf of all the people of Haiti.

The convening of this High-level Meeting illustrates the constructive desire of Member States to commit to creating a more secure and stable environment for the harmonious development of youth around the globe, who seek peace, security, health and knowledge. In this respect, Haiti can but welcome such an initiative and congratulate the co-chairs and facilitators of the outcome document, who have provided young people with a valuable tool, the use of which can only be worthwhile.

The Haitian delegation endorses the statement to be made by the representative of Argentina, as Chair of the Group of 77 and China, and that made by the representative of Suriname on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)(see A/65/PV.111).

In launching the national education fund on 26 May 2011, the President of the Republic declared he had good news for the children of Haiti, with the launching of a cross-sectoral consortium to finance their education. This declaration confirmed one of the pillars of state action, that is, providing free primary education for those who have never had the opportunity to go to school because they lacked the means to do so.

In a country where more than half of the population is under age 21, education is one of the sectors able to guarantee a better future for young people, and the Government of 14 May has understood this. That is why the Government is coordinating the activities of national and international stakeholders in order to develop a legal and institutional framework that will guarantee the socio-economic integration of young people in order to keep them away from the temptations of drugs, organized crime and prostitution. Creating conditions conducive to hope and opportunity is essential.

The Haitian delegation, which I have the honour of leading, believes that international cooperation is essential in order to eliminate the exploitation and use of child labour, which contravenes all moral and ethical standards. Haiti urges Member States to scale up efforts not only in drawing up legal texts, but also — and above all — in ensuring their implementation.

The delegation of the Republic of Haiti realizes that young people around the world are a crucial human resource for sustainable development, social progress and technological innovation. Therefore, their contribution to local, national and regional development should be welcomed and appreciated. The Haitian delegation believes that the spirit of rebuilding a durable social environment of protection and of developing young people should continue to inspire the action of all States in order to guarantee better survival, development and effective protection.

I would like to conclude by pausing to commemorate the memory of the victims of the despicable attack of Friday, 22 July 2011 in central

Oslo and the killings that followed on the island of Utøya, which led to so much pain and suffering for the bereaved families.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yaba Pedro Alberto, Deputy Minister of Youth of Angola.

Mr. Alberto (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): At the outset, the Government of Angola would like to convey to the people of Norway our most deeply felt condolences for the recent loss of lives in that country.

The issues under discussion at this meeting illustrate the international community's concern with the problems youth face and which require the special attention of the Member States to ensure the sustainable well-being of young people.

Like the rest of the African continent, Angola has a population of mostly young people. In our case, more than 40 per cent of the population is under 30 years of age.

Regarding youth, in 2005 the Government adopted an Executive Youth Support Plan, which aims to solve the most essential social aspirations of youth in terms of housing, technical and vocational training, employment, social and subsidized credit and the promotion of young entrepreneurs, inter alia. After evaluating the results of the first five years of implementation of this Plan, a proposal for a state policy for youth was drafted.

In analysing the declaration that is the subject of this meeting, we believe that matters related to youth should be included in the United Nations position, especially in the following areas. A specialized United Nations agency should to address youth-related issues should be created, as should a United Nations juvenile court to coordinate youth-related issues in the General Assembly. The professionalization of working with youth should be encouraged. The World Programme of Action for Youth should be reviewed and adjusted, especially the mechanisms for its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. United Nations cooperation with the appropriate national, subregional and continental pro-youth structures should be strengthened. Lastly, we should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the declaration adopted at this meeting (resolution 65/312).

On behalf of the Angolan delegation and youth, we welcome the opportunity to participate in this forum of dialogue on and between youth, and we believe that with everyone's efforts, we can achieve the goals we have set.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sorin Moldovan, Under-Secretary of State and Vice-President of the National Authority for Sport and Youth of Romania.

Mr. Moldovan (Romania): Allow me to express, on behalf of the Romanian people, our deepest condolences to the bereaved people of Norway for the tragic events of Friday 22 July, which claimed the lives of so many innocents. Since the main victims of this despicable act of hatred were youth and perhaps the future leaders of a nation, the tragedy brings to this meeting an added sense of urgency.

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be present here at the United Nations, in this very special period marked by the International Year of Youth under the theme of "Dialogue and mutual understanding", while at the same time we are celebrating 25 years since the first International Year of Youth, in 1985, under the theme "Participation, Development, Peace".

We all now have the opportunity to be here together, as representatives from different continents and cultures, and we must recognize that this meeting should represent a turning point for consolidating a common perspective on how to address the challenges faced by youth in the globalized world of today.

The World Programme of Action for Youth, as amended in 2007, is described as a global blueprint for youth policies and programmes. It identifies 15 priority areas that require continuous and important efforts. The world in which we live today needs these efforts. The complicated mix consisting of the global financial crisis, uncertainty and emerging conflicts affects our own way of living. We need to face reality and recognize the fact that young people are particularly vulnerable in these times of crisis.

I am here today both as a representative of Romanian youth and as a token of my country's commitment in promoting youth at top decision-making levels in the Government in matters concerning youth. From this position I am and will be a steadfast supporter of the idea of taking action and offering opportunities for youth — because today's youth are the main resources of tomorrow.

We live in a quickly growing global society in which the links between nations are growing ever stronger and more complex, and I strongly believe that this presents the youth of today not with an extra challenge but with a unique opportunity. Mobility has allowed young people to develop a better sense of understanding towards other cultures and societies, breeding tolerance and balance. From this point of view, I think we have reason to be optimistic, since more and more young people from challenged areas of the world now benefit from the fruits of globalization.

Global society and its inherent mobility offer young individuals the possibility for better training in various fields, making a considerable contribution to their overall capacity to adapt to the increasingly complex requirements of today's dynamic global labour market. On the other hand, we should not be discouraged in supporting the costs of facilitating, introducing and promoting youth access to information and communication technologies, which are crucial elements that cannot be denied in our increasingly interdependent global society.

Youth organizations around the world represent an asset, and we, the Member States, need to continuously support the non-governmental sector as a key factor in the efficient promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms and tolerance. The key for a sound democratic life is dialogue. Therefore we need to support cooperation with civil society and identify the best channels to address the needs of young people, especially those who are the most disadvantaged.

Member States also need to focus on developing coherent national youth policies that take into account the current state of the globalization process and its impact on young people from different regions of the world.

There is a crucial responsibility that lies on the shoulders of United Nations entities, national youth bodies and Governments, and that is to develop or improve existing programmes and increase financial support for achieving national and regional goals.

As a brief example of my country's most recent concrete action in delivering on its commitments regarding youth, I will refer only to the legislative initiative passed this year aimed specifically at encouraging and facilitating the establishment of small and medium-sized companies by young people. Through this measure, the Government seeks to engage even more youth in the private sector, especially during these difficult economic times, when all of society must take an active part in a robust and sustainable economic recovery.

In addition, I would like to point out that in Romania, the United Nations youth delegate programme is being coordinated by a specialized body, the National Authority for Sport and Youth. We undertook this responsibility bearing in mind that young people must have the opportunity to have insight into the manner in which global high-level decisions are taken. Therefore we encourage other Member States to support this programme as a fundamental tool for youth participation in democratic life.

The adoption of the declaration of the High-level Meeting on Youth of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, on the theme "Dialogue and Mutual Understanding" (resolution 65/312), represents a success that allows us to hope that tomorrow will be a better day for the youth we represent.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mitali Protais, Minister for Youth, Sports and Culture of Rwanda, who will also speak on behalf of the African States.

Mr. Protais (Rwanda): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and on behalf of the African Group and the Conference of Ministers in charge of youth affairs in the African Union, allow me to express my sincere condolences to the people of Norway upon the tragedy that befell their nation, which resulted in the loss of many lives.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group, which also aligns itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Dialogue and mutual agreement have always been the basis for the maintenance of good relations between individuals and different societies from the oldest times. Nowadays, with all of the communications and technology facilities that have evolved over these last decades, long-distance dialogue among young people has increased greatly, thus making the world smaller while widening the opportunities that it offers. However, not all the young people of the world profit from that dialogue because of the many challenges related to the development of their respective countries, including a great part of the African continent.

Driven by the will to analyse the question of how to integrate young people in the development of their countries, and with the contribution provided by their flourishing in their communities, the heads of African States have, during their Assembly, taken decisions aiming at providing information and communication technologies to their people, including youth, which will allow them to reinforce dialogue and communication and share their experience with other young people worldwide.

These decisions concern, inter alia, the strengthening of national programmes and regional cooperation for development, the interconnection of infrastructure through broadband, the deployment of regional Internet exchange points, and the improvement of the connectivity of the rural sector based on the principles of the neutrality of technology, non-discrimination and open access in support of PIDA and through the use of synergies with the transport and the energy sectors.

The African heads of State also decided to develop programmes and actions for the acquisition of basic competences in communication and information technologies and for reinforcing capacities, in particular for the national and regional standardization bodies.

Other efforts are also being made at the level of the African continent, such as those on universal access to education, the empowerment of girls and young women, the sensitization of young people in the fight against HIV/AIDS and drugs, and the demobilization and socio-economic rehabilitation of young people who participated directly in armed conflict.

However, a major challenge confronting young people in the world and in particular on the African continent is to become established. Those who are likely to find work come up against under-employment and the indecent conditions of such work. It enormously affects their health and their output. Therefore we recommend that a global strategy on the employment of young people be analysed in order to see how to join our efforts to maximize the ways to offer employment and decent work conditions to them.

These efforts should not be limited to the national or regional levels. If the issue of taking up the challenges that all young people face is dealt with at the global level, the combined efforts of the nations will make it possible to eliminate a good number of them. That will contribute in various ways to the achievement of certain objectives of the Charter of the United Nations, such as peacekeeping, and of the Millennium Development Goals, which are also included in the World Programme of Action for Youth.

The world has always changed, and changes have always been brought about by the new generation. Accordingly, organizations of young people should be created to channel their ideals and aspirations in order to give them the possibility of exchange with their elders, thus contributing to the socio-economic and cultural development of their countries.

Eager to reinforce such dialogue, African heads of State met under the theme "Accelerate youth empowerment for sustainable development" and decided on the need for a coordinating or lead United Nations agency to facilitate youth matters and dedicated to youth development programmes within the United Nations, and to coordinate and raise funds for youth development initiatives within Member States. In Africa, we feel that youth development and empowerment will not be fully realized if youth representation in all organs and bodies remains a challenge.

Once young people, in all their diversity, fully take part in decision-making through the appropriate channels, they will contribute to peacekeeping in their respective countries and the world and will open the door to continuity, without clashes in its respective communities.

It is important that the decisions that we make today be put into action and be evaluated in the future, because they are important, and they blow a wind of hope for innumerable young people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. María Rubiales de Chamorro, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish to express our condolences to and solidarity with the people and Government of Norway, who have been victims of a criminal attack that has been vehemently condemned by our people and Government.

Nicaragua has a population of almost 6 million inhabitants. Of them, 70 per cent are 29 years old or less. That is a great development opportunity in the coming years, as we invest in capacity-building and economic development, starting with education, training or accumulation of work and business experience and on the basis of the life cycle and personal careers of the workforce.

It is worth underscoring that most jobs — 58 per cent — are done by individuals less than 30 years old. With the triumph of the people's Sandanista revolution in 1979, the participation of young people in the revolutionary fight and victory and in the literacy campaign that reduced illiteracy from 60 per cent to 12.5 per cent was stressed.

Since 2007 — the date of the second phase of our revolution — the people of Nicaragua have been ensuring their revolutionary present and future, since they have integrated young people into social programmes that the Government develops for the well-being of the people. Thus our Government plan for the period 2012-2016 gives priority to social and economic polices that ensure job creation and quality work, in particular for young people. Young people have been empowering, training and educating themselves in order to take the forefront that belongs to them in countless activities developed either by them or for them. They are no longer mere spectators, but have become actors.

Nicaragua's young people have assumed their commitment to society as youth building the present and future. They participate decisively in each and every one of the major programmes promoted by our Government. Those programmes include the construction of houses, rural and urban schools and sports facilities, health and literacy days, natural disaster brigades, reforestation, the promotion of a cultural identity, the protection of our Mother Earth and support for natural resource conservation. In short, our young people are at the forefront of that great scheme and extensive plan to restore the rights of the Nicaraguan people, youth and family.

In Nicaragua, we are experiencing a youth revolution. Today, young people are the standard-bearers. They lead social programmes, supporting the country's poorest people. They see our homeland as Mother Earth, liberty and revolution. Nicaragua believes that each year is the year of youth. This year, we have celebrated it, and will continue to do so with further work for and greater commitment to the revolution and people of Nicaragua.

We still have challenges and obstacles to be addressed as a priority. We must continue to improve the quality of employment and work and generate more and better jobs for young people, focusing on women. We must continue to promote and defend compliance with young people's human rights, helping to create possibilities and conditions that facilitate including the youth as complete social actors, with full enjoyment of their rights.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mrs. Nicole Ameline, National Assembly Deputy and member of the Foreign Affairs Commission of France.

Mrs. Ameline (France) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of France, I would first like to join all speakers who have conveyed their condolences to Norway following the tragedy that struck that country.

I would like to thank the United Nations for having organized this High-level Meeting on Youth, who are too often forgotten and who must be returned to the centre of the social, economic and political dialogue.

France associates itself with the statement to be made on behalf of the European Union, and would like to add some observations in its national capacity.

France has always considered young people the cornerstone of development. We recall in particular the 2005 France-Africa summit, with the stirring title "African youth — its vitality, its creativity and its aspirations". On that occasion, for the first time, young people from five regions of Africa were able to express their aspirations and expectations.

We are convinced that the future of young people requires first and foremost quality education for all. In France, the budget of the Ministry of National Education represents the largest part of the State budget, 21 per cent in 2010. Our country is one of the leading international donors of education development assistance, with a total amount of official assistance of approximately €1.5 billion in 2009. Along with supporting basic education in developing countries, France also provides aid for higher education. This year France hosted 278,000 foreign students in its universities, who represent about 12 per cent of that entire student population.

However, education, as a fundamental pillar of society's economic and social development, must be directly linked to the needs of the professional world. For that reason France is working to create training and employment opportunities. Here I would like to give two examples, namely, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, which are described in the text of my statement.

In conclusion, I call the Assembly's attention to the situation of young girls, a topic that is especially dear to me, as I hold the position of Vice-President of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Today at least 600 million young girls throughout the world live in extremely vulnerable situations. They encounter difficulties in accessing education, in early marriage and pregnancy and in social and professional inequalities. A child born of a literate mother has a 50 per cent greater chance of living beyond five years of age. Women who have benefited from post-primary education are five times more likely than illiterate women to have information on HIV/AIDS. Almost two thirds of the 792 million illiterate individuals worldwide are women. In 2010, only 9 of 151 elected heads of State were women.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is a particularly important tool to counter discrimination against women. The implementation of States' commitments to this framework is absolutely essential. We must give priority to our young people, especially the young girls, in order to create a sustainable world and sustainable development, more just and without poverty.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Lungisa (South Africa): At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important meeting on youth. My Government attaches great importance to that important segment of our society.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the statement earlier in this meeting by Rwanda on behalf of the Africa Group, and the statement by Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (see A/65/PV.111).

We commend the United Nations for proclaiming the International Year of Youth, under the theme "Youth: Dialogue and mutual understanding". This provides an important opportunity to strengthen dialogue and mutual understanding among youth globally and to promote youth participation, and also to increase investment by Governments and the international community in young people through addressing the challenges that hinder their development.

Youth should be seen as agents of change and development. They should be at the forefront in addressing major societal challenges such as realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A quick glance at the eight Millennium Development Goals reveals that they are directly related to the well-being of children and young people. The MDGs provide for the need to address youth development, employment, maternal health and reducing exposure to HIV and AIDS. This indicates that the MDGs are in many respects youth development goals.

It is time for Member States to move from commitment to results-oriented actions. We should channel all our energies to youth development, since the youth are today's resources and tomorrow's leaders. We should remember that young people hold the key to society's future. Their ambitions, goals and aspirations for peace, security, development and human rights are often in accordance with those of society as a whole. The recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa are evidence that youth continue to play a vital role in the democratization of our countries.

The South African Government established the National Youth Development Agency in 2009 with a view to addressing issues affecting youth development. The establishment of the Agency illustrates the importance that South Africa places in youth issues. The Agency promotes coordination in youth development matters across all spheres of Government.

Last month, South Africa commemorated its National Youth Day on 16 June, which also marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the 16 June 1976 uprising. This day continues to remind us about the contributions made by young people in the fight against apartheid. We must continue recognizing the contributions that can be made by young people to their communities and society at the global level.

At the regional level, South Africa has ratified the African Youth Charter. During the recent African Union Summit — which was held under the theme "Accelerating Youth Development for Sustainable Development" — the African leaders agreed on international collaboration and cooperation as key elements in financing youth development priorities. A call was made to the development partners and all relevant stakeholders to align youth development-related programmes to the Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009-2018).

South Africa also supports a proposal agreed at subregional level on accelerating youth development through the establishment of a United Nations agency to initiate, fund and promote youth development priorities in Member States. This call has been made in view of the need to pool youth development resources in order to ensure greater impact.

Let us collectively, as Member States, avoid creating an island of success within an ocean of poverty. Our intervention on youth development should be measured not only by how individual countries have fared, but by the international commitments we have carried out to support youth development in our respective countries.

I wish to conclude by quoting the call from the late President Oliver Reginald Tambo, who said, "A nation that does not take care of its youth does not have a future and does not deserve one". In this regard, our words should translate into concrete and measurable action by making available the resources required and investing in programmes that are geared towards youth development.

We are also very happy that the United Nations Member States proclaimed 18 July as Nelson Mandela Day, when all must endeavour to serve 67 minutes in our own communities all over the world. We have celebrated that great day in South Africa.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vladzimir Shchastny, Chair of the Belarus National Commission for UNESCO and Ambassador-at-large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Shchastny (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): I wish to begin by expressing my country's heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the families and friends of the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place last Friday in Norway.

There is a traditional Belarusian saying that advises, "Preserve your dignity in your youth and you will not encounter trouble". The youth policy of the Government of Belarus is aimed at educating young people to feel responsible for their future and that of society as a whole. The principles of this policy were endorsed in a special law adopted in 2009 that provides for protection and enforcement of the rights and legitimate interests of young people; creation of conditions conducive to their free and effective participation in the development of society; social, material, legal and other support for young people; and empowerment of youth decision-making on matters concerning their future. Of particular importance in the Government youth policy is international cooperation. That is one reason that the Republic of Belarus consistently advocates for providing support to young people and developing their potential in the framework of the United Nations.

We commend the active engagement of relevant United Nations entities in carrying out various activities for youth, especially the establishment in 2010 of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, aimed at improving the effectiveness of United Nations activities in this sphere. Its results attest to the effectiveness of the network, which was coordinated in the past year by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNESCO.

However, along with interaction among United Nations entities, it is necessary to develop global partnerships on youth issues, with the participation of Member States, youth organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Only the concerted and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders can lead to the effective implementation of youth policies at the national and international levels.

Our country welcomes the convening of this timely High-level Meeting, which should explore current issues on the global youth agenda. In our opinion, as the International Year of Youth comes to an end, it is time to review the World Programme of Action for Youth. We need to update the priorities of the World Programme of Action, adding such issues as migration, financial and economic crises and human trafficking. One result of this Meeting could be a recommendation to the General Assembly to forge a new global partnership for youth. During the 2010 Summit on the Millennium Development Goals, Belarus proposed creating a global partnership under the title "Help Future Generations Prosper", focused on investing in future global leadership by providing support to talented young people.

It is also crucial to tackle the social degradation of youth, in particular factors that lead to negative consequences for youth, even in highly developed countries. We advocate convening an interactive thematic discussion in the General Assembly on youth policies in the near future in order to continue the discussion and create new frameworks for international cooperation on youth issues.

In conclusion, I would like to express our delegation's satisfaction with the adoption by consensus of the outcome document of this High-level Meeting on Youth (resolution 65/312). The Republic of Belarus played an active part in negotiating the resolution and stands ready to implement the provisions of that important strategic document.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ronan Farrow, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Global Youth Issues of the United States of America.

Mr. Farrow (United States of America): I am very grateful to be here today and to be a part of this conversation as we confront what is both a great shared challenge and a great shared opportunity.

Now more than ever, as we all know, young people are at the very core of changing world events. More than 60 per cent of the world's population is under the age of 30. That demographic, increasingly empowered by the new technologies that we have discussed at this Meeting, is increasingly a potential driver of great economic and social reform. However, it is also the case that we all acknowledge that that demographic can be one of the great threats to national and international stability and security. Of all nations with new outbreaks of civil conflict, 86 per cent have significant majorities under the age of 30.

Those realities obviously are not lost on the countries represented in this Hall. I have had great conversations over the past several days with many people here, and many countries have made tremendous strides to attract the world's best and brightest youth to their job markets and universities.

Unfortunately, those realities have also not been lost on our shared adversaries. Extremist and criminal organizations also have sophisticated and comprehensive youth strategies, offering young people empowerment, a sense of belonging, a sense of political participation. Boys and young men are often the prime targets of such extremist recruitment, fuelling unrest around the world. Girls and young women are very often the most vulnerable victims of disenfranchisement and oppression, and an under-tapped resource in the fight for economic growth. All young people, as we have seen in the tragic events of recent days, can be targeted as they express their political rights. We stand in solidarity with Norway today.

President Obama said in his seminal Cairo speech in 2009:

> "[T]o young people of every faith, in every country — you, more than anyone, have the ability to remake this world".

But who gives them the tools to remake that world will profoundly affect security around the world and the prosperity of all of our nations. The ball is in our court. We cannot afford to wait.

Youth engagement has already been a priority at many United States embassies. We have developed effective approaches to interacting with young people, from exchange programmes to democracy training and development, health and livelihood programmes. We have sought to give young people a voice on the global stage. In December 2010, Ambassador Susan Rice chaired a Security Council meeting where youth set the agenda themselves — the first time that young people had an opportunity to influence the course of the most influential body on international peace and security.

Still, we recognized that the United States could be doing more. We needed to make challenging institutional changes at the very highest level. Last year, Secretary Clinton launched an exhaustive review of America's international youth policy and programming. That review was targeted at changing our capacity to empower the next generation of leaders. It resulted in a pledge to empower young people as positive economic and civic actors through our programmes, to work hand in hand with countries like those represented in this Hall today to create enabling environments for youth in all of our borders, and to explore new ways to talk to and, perhaps most importantly, to listen to young people.

To oversee that historic effort, we are launching a new State Department Office of Global Youth Issues. It is my privilege to be leading that initiative as Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Global Youth Issues. The United States is focusing on economic empowerment, through programmes around the world that educate, create employment opportunities and foster entrepreneurship for young people, such as the Youth:Work programme, which has trained and employed thousands of young people in Latin America.

We are launching initiatives that encourage civic participation, create local leadership opportunities and develop linkages between young people and their Governments. One important example is the Yemen Student Councils Project, which has established councils for young people in hundreds of schools across that country, familiarizing people of that age group with community participation and the basics of democracy. We are pushing the envelope to involve young people in the execution of these programmes too, with successes like the Yes Youth Can programme in Kenya, which features an innovative youth-led and youth-managed social innovation fund.

Accompanying programmes like these around the world is a new focus on youth issues in our discussions with the international community. That conversation begins here and now. The United States welcomes and will continue to foster follow-on activities to ensure that it does not end this summer.

I look out at this Hall and I am excited, because I see a group of nations that understand this watershed moment and that stand poised to lead the response to it. Nigeria is one of them. It recently hosted the first African Urban Youth Assembly, gathering youth from across Africa to guide their leaders on urban development. Likewise, Brazil completed an 18-month youth dialogue, surveying young Brazilians about their views on democracy and their role in society. I also commend Austria and Benin, which acted as co-facilitators of that event.

This is a moment when we are prioritizing listening to young voices and responding to their call for action. It is the call to provide young people with access to livelihood and to employment, to promote gender and minority equality, and to confront the human rights abuses that so often drive and deepen poverty. That call, as I said, is both a challenge and an opportunity, and it is one we cannot wait to confront. The young people of our nations are, as we speak, transforming our security and prosperity. They are not just the future, as several have pointed out; they are now. We can work with them to create a better now.

I look forward to this event being just one of many catalysts in a long and fruitful process of joining hands with each other and with young people around the world, to accomplish just that.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. María Laura Braiza, National Director of Youth from the Ministry of Social Development of Argentina, who will speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Ms. Braiza (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China at this High-level Meeting on Youth, the highlight event of the International Year of Youth. The decision to hold this event originated with an initiative of the Group of 77 and China and with the constructive engagement of all Member States. We agreed to convene this important meeting and to produce a substantive outcome document (resolution 65/312), which will undoubtedly contribute to youth development.

The High-level Meeting's central theme "Youth: dialogue and mutual understanding" provides all of us — Member States, the United Nations system, youth organizations and other stakeholders — the opportunity to exchange views on the challenges related to youth, to discuss how best to address them and to commit to taking concrete action. The central theme of dialogue and mutual understanding should inspire all our efforts in this regard.

The Group of 77 and China would like to stress the need for further efforts to support young people in developing their potential and to tackle the obstacles they face. In this regard, the primary responsibility for ensuring youth development lies with States, which should develop comprehensive policies and action plans that focus on the best interests of youth. The Group of 77 and China encourages the international community to support Member States, through enhanced international cooperation and the fulfilment of all their official development assistance commitments, in their efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve full employment and social integration.

Additionally, the Group of 77 and China reaffirms the importance of the World Programme of Action for Youth as the framework for youth policies, while recognizing the urgency of further developing it in order to fully address all the challenges that currently affect young people. The Group of 77 and China also acknowledges that the problems that young people face today must be dealt with in a broader context of coordinated action based on a holistic approach, directly addressing issues that encompass a vast range of multidimensional aspects. The very nature of the problems afflicting young people today demands such complementary actions as providing the best education possible, giving access to employment opportunities, enabling adequate food supplies and nutrition, creating a healthy physical and social environment, assuring the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and participation in decision-making processes.

Moreover, the Group firmly believes that by bridging gaps in every area of inequality — social, regional, racial, gender and others — we will make a significant contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Youth unemployment is a clear example of a challenge affecting young people that requires new ideas and renewed effort from Member States and the international community. Unemployment has become a global problem that affects young people all over the world. The Group of 77 and China urges all Member States to consider undertaking efforts to develop a global strategy for effectively addressing this issue.

The Group 77 and China underscores the need to ensure that all of our citizens, including our young people, enjoy the highest possible standards of health, and will continue to work to realize this objective. The Group also recognizes the importance of protecting young people from violence and crime and of preventing and addressing their involvement in criminal activity, including drug-related activity. These issues remain on our agenda as we strive to provide healthy environments for younger generations.

The Group of 77 and China urges Member States to take concerted action, in accordance with international law, to remove the obstacles to the full realization of the rights of young people living under foreign occupation, in order to promote achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Group also condemns the recruitment and use of young people in armed conflict, in contravention of relevant international law; deplores its negative consequences on the young people concerned; and calls on Member States, in cooperation with United Nations entities, to take concrete measures and continue to support programmes to ensure the effective social and economic reintegration and rehabilitation of demobilized young people.

The Group of 77 and China remains committed to working to improve the lives of young people in all our countries to help them realize their full potential and make valuable and positive contributions to the development of our societies.

Allow me to add a few words in my national capacity. The Government of Argentina is extending its public policies aimed at enabling young people to participate in society in various ways. We emphasize the importance of young people in building a country's future with greater levels of justice and equality, and in strengthening the democratic system, including them in the decision-making processes, particularly in Government institutions.

This generation will continue to be the standard bearers of human rights as a fundamental condition of life, and will continue to move forward with the discussion of the sovereign restitution of the Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich islands. A generation that participates, as our President, Cristina Fernández Kirchner, has said, is essential to building an Argentina that is more inclusive and with greater solidarity. With commitment, passion and conviction, the young people of Argentina will continue to build a more equal society in the context of peace, human rights and sustainable development. We are proud of the words of our former President, Néstor Kirchner, when he said that when youth marches forward, change is inevitable.

In conclusion, we recall the fifty-ninth anniversary of the death of a great woman, a tireless fighter for social rights, Eva Duarte Perón — Evita, to the people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Berhane Gebre-Kristos, State Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia.

Mr. Gebre-Kristos (Ethiopia): At the outset, I would like to join other speakers in expressing our condolences and deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Norway for their loss in the horrendous act of terrorism committed against them last Friday. Let me also offer my delegation's congratulations to the President of the Assembly for his successful organization of this High-level Meeting.

This meeting could not be more timely. The current global economic situation has created very precarious conditions for young people. Without hope for the future, young people cannot be expected to contribute viably to our societies, and ensuring peace and stability will be impossible if they continue to live without hope.

Africa is the most underdeveloped continent and home to the second largest youth population worldwide, after Asia. African youth have limited access to decent jobs and sustainable income. Indeed, Africa has shown promising progress in economic growth over the past decade, but the negative impact of the global economic situation on that progress over the past two years and the fact that growth has not been inclusive have resulted in insufficient progress to boost the hopes of young people.

Ensuring only the economic well-being of our young people and their social integration would be inadequate to fully addressing their needs. Their active participation in vital political reforms and the democratization process is also critical. They should be given a political space to pursue their political views and specific interests, and they need to be certain that their participation in addressing societal challenges will contribute to policy formulation and execution.

It is extremely important to emphasize the fact that a separate set of measures cannot serve to address youth challenges unless those measures, first and foremost, address the fundamental challenges of our societies. Moreover, it must be underlined that actions taken solely at the national level will not yield the desired results unless they are supplemented by international cooperation.

In the light of this self-evident fact, my delegation calls on the international community to implement the internationally agreed development goals, particularly the Millennium Development Goals, in a timely fashion to overcome the development challenges of the developing countries. It is therefore my delegation's belief that what is needed now is not new strategies, but rather the necessary political commitment to deliver on our promises.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Fanny Hermenier, President of the Committee on Education of Monaco.

Ms. Hermenier (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to convey my sincere condolences and sympathy to the people and Government of Norway following the tragedy they have suffered. I also thank the General Assembly and the Government of the Principality of Monaco for providing me with the unique opportunity to speak before the Assembly today and to dialogue with young people from all regions of the world.

The outcome document adopted by the Assembly (resolution 65/312) is a decisive step towards a better understanding on the part of every Member State of the core role that young people should play in implementing the objectives of the United Nations at the national and international levels.

George Bernanos wrote:

> "It is the fever of young people that keeps the world temperature stable. When young people cool down, the rest of the world feels the chill."

It is that feverish youth yearning for democracy, human rights and justice who have paved the way for new regimes. Indeed, the Arab Spring would have been impossible without young people, whose essential role has been widely lauded and emphasized.

Those protest movements and uprisings also reflect the staunch will of young people to actively participate at all levels of decision-making to establish their role in the transition towards a modern and democratic society. Moreover, young people also have an instrumental role to play in international organizations so that decisions taken will include their point of view, in particular in the framework of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which call for joint efforts that must include youth participation.

My country, like others, is working to reduce disparities and inequalities among young people across the world through official development assistance. Monaco's cooperation supports efforts to gain universal access to education, without discrimination, through the financing of cultural centres or educational programmes for poor youth living in shantytowns or children of refugees.

Moreover, the Principality has developed student exchange partnerships that create opportunities for young people in developing countries to participate in training programmes in Monegasque institutions, in order to promote knowledge transfer and sharing and to bring young people together from different cultures.

Health care and countering malnutrition are concerns that should be considered essential to the well-being of future generations and societies. It is absolutely unacceptable that children and young people continue to die each day of hunger and treatable diseases due to lack of access to care or treatment. That is one reason that Monaco has cooperated in efforts to prioritize intervention efforts in the health sector.

Finally, I underscore that the rights of children and young people should not be abridged. Young people and children are by definition among the most vulnerable populations and too often silent victims of serious violence. In that context, States must respect their commitments undertaken in regional and international organizations. On 20 and 21 November, the Principality of Monaco will host a conference on "Building a Europe for and with children", under the auspices of the Council of Europe, where discussions with participating children will be centred primarily on defining a new European strategy on the rights of the child.

Our youth does not blind us to the shocking, cruel and unjust realities of the world we live in. We are the Internet generation. Thanks to social networks, blogs and virtual communities, we are aware of the injustice, despair and decadence confronting members of our generation who may sometimes live far from us and our daily concerns. Let us recognize this irreversible interdependence and establish dialogues among cultures.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Pierre Maudet, President of the Federal Commission on Youth of Switzerland.

Mr. Maudet (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland joins the many others who have spoken in expressing its profound condolences to the Norwegian people following the recent tragedy.

Switzerland believes that the effective participation of young people will guarantee their social integration and a sustainable future for society. Switzerland has established various participatory mechanisms, such as youth parliaments, and encourages similar initiatives.

The Swiss National Youth Council, founded in 1933, is the oldest such national body in Europe. Switzerland has been participating since 2003 in the United Nations youth delegate programme. Including young people in participatory processes, preparing them to assume responsibility and familiarizing them with democratic institutions and processes will also help to curb their lack of interest in politics, in particular in the developed countries, where youth disengagement has achieved record levels. Every country must promote training on youth and human rights.

The sustainable and social integration of young people also requires quality training and efforts to curtail unemployment and temporary employment. A lack of opportunities for young people can lead to social tensions and conflict. Dignified and well-remunerated employment, a stable situation and security are prerequisites to raising a family and building a life. Five of the eight Millennium Development Goals require investment in young people, who are particularly vulnerable.

Education, training and innovation are the pillars of our economic, social and environmental development. Policies should counter unemployment and support job placement and appropriate training with a view to lifelong and life-wide learning.

Switzerland has taken measures to ensure employment for young people who have completed training and to fund training for the unemployed. Information and communications technology is a fantastic tool to promote the participation and integration of young people in society by creating links and bridges and by contributing to learning about democracy and human rights with a view to creating an open society for all, with education and training opportunities. It places young people at the centre of action for democratic change and progress.

Switzerland underscores the importance of information and communications technology and encourages the provision and facilitation of affordable access, particularly for disenfranchised youth — especially in developing countries — while taking steps to protect against related risks. In that respect, our country, working together with the private sector, launched a national programme aimed at the protection of children and youth in the area of media and information technology.

Cooperation on the part of the various stakeholders involved and the participation of youth are of key importance at the local, national and international levels if we are to attain the Millennium Development Goals and implement the World Programme of Action for Youth, which remain pivotal in guiding our efforts.

In times of crisis, youth-related policies are at risk. They must not be relegated to the sidelines. Sufficient resources must be allocated to them, and periodic progress assessments carried out. The outcome document is action-oriented, and today's statements must be translated into tomorrow's actions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Severine Macedo, National Secretary for Youth Affairs of Brazil.

Ms. Macedo (Brazil) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): I should like at the outset to acknowledge the presence of Ambassador Maria Luiza Viotti, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, and that of the Executive Director of UNFPA, Babatunde Osotimehin. I should also like in particular to extend my greetings to the young people here and to those who, even at a distance, are following this important Meeting.

We are very pleased to participate in this Meeting. Brazil, which is now experiencing a positive growth trend, believes that economic, social and environmental development is inextricably linked to youth-related public policies.

In that context, recognition of the diversity of youth is non-negotiable. We are young people from the city and from the countryside — which I call home; we are young blacks, Indians, whites and Asians; we are young women and men; we are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual; we are young people with and without disabilities; we are young people from different social classes whose inequalities are decreasing each year; we are young people with different cultural backgrounds and experiences; we are young people who experiment with the most diverse rhythms, colours and artistic creations; we are youth who promote citizenship on our territories; and we are the ones who are connected to the world through social networks. We are the first generation of the twenty-first century, but, above all, we are young people who live in peace and are building a country that is developing democratically.

In Brazil, a country of about 190 million people, 50 million of us are between the ages of 15 and 29. This demographic dividend can increase production, per capita income, savings and investment and bolster the social protection network, expanding production and the protection of rights.

Under the administration of President Dilma Rousseff, the first woman to hold the highest office in the executive branch, Brazil has undertaken the task of consolidating the legacy of former President Lula with regard to growth and income distribution. Now our focus is to eradicate poverty. We believe that a rich country is a country without poverty, and that in order to achieve that goal, investing in youth is fundamental.

The International Year of Youth has demonstrated that young people deserve higher priority on the multilateral agenda. The Year is coming to an end, but we know that the challenges will continue. The international agenda should incorporate young people, both in specific policies and in cross-cutting areas. In this respect, Brazil has sought to make its contribution through South-South cooperation projects.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of seeing young people as individuals deserving of rights and as strategic agents for sustainable and cooperative development. It is essential to invest in the promotion of decent work, education at all levels and the prevention of violence. We must also make advances in terms of ensuring other rights, including the right to political participation and freedom of movement, affirmative action, and the rights to leisure, culture, ownership, quality of life, diversity and security.

We want, and are working to build, a better and more equal world for all; to that end, it is imperative to invest in youth, especially in developing countries. This better and more equal world will be a reality only when we are certain that the generational transition will be based on the empowerment of youth and when young people have the autonomy to forge their own destinies.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Lilli Attallah, Member of the Executive Board of the National Council of Youth of Egypt.

Ms. Attallah (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to begin my statement by expressing my delegation's heartfelt condolences to the people and the Government of Norway in connection with the lives lost in the abhorrent terrorist attack in that country a few days ago. The Government and the people of Egypt stand in solidarity with the people of Norway against terrorism.

The convening of this High-level Meeting on Youth, organized to celebrate the International Year of Youth, is of particular significance owing to the fact that 2011 has witnessed youth revolutions, particularly in the Arab region. The Arab spring, inspired by Arab youth, made clear the critical role youth can play in their societies at all levels. They have an essential role to play in their countries at all levels, and efforts must be made to meet the challenges that hamper their development throughout the world.

The majority of the world's young people live in the developing countries and thus are the most affected by the global financial and economic crises as well as by the other challenges that hinder their access to education, decent work, health care and housing.

Despite the efforts made by developing countries through their strategies and programmes aimed at meeting the increasing needs of their young people, the latter continue to suffer from poverty, marginalization, unemployment and consequently are at risk of being exploited in various ways, including in the context of organized crime, human trafficking, irregular migration and armed conflicts.

These challenges require that all Member States fully implement their national plans of action aimed at accelerating youth development, in accordance with youth-related internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals; with the support of donor countries, international financial institutions and the United Nations system; and without conditionality. It is important that the private sector and civil society be instrumental in this regard.

We in Egypt believe that the outcome document of this High-level Meeting (resolution 65/312) draws an action-oriented path in this connection. We thus stress the importance of its full implementation, particularly the development of a global strategy on youth employment and the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Egypt considers that world youth face several main challenges that today, most importantly social and economic development and political participation. Egypt remains strongly committed today to taking the necessary steps towards the social development of all Egyptians as part of a people-centred development strategy, while placing young people at the top of our national priorities.

The Government of Egypt is striving to implement its national strategies and programmes for youth, and expresses its appreciation to the international community for its technical and financial support of such strategies.

Through the Egyptian revolution, the country's young people have proved that they are a force for change and are able to participate in national policy reform. We are committed to meeting the challenges and achieving national goals and objectives to ensure a decent life for Egyptians, especially the young people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Miguel Ángel Carreón Sánchez, Director of the National Institute of Youth of Mexico.

Mr. Carreón Sánchez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to express on behalf of Mexico our condolences to and solidarity with the people and the Government of Norway for the tragic events that occurred last week.

Currently, over 200 million youth live on less than a dollar a day, 88 million are unemployed, 160 million suffer from malnutrition, 130 million have not had access to basic levels of education, and 10 million live with HIV/AIDS. We should not wait any longer to change this reality and adapt our development strategies to consider youth as active agents of development in our societies.

The world is populated by more than one billion young people between 15 and 29 years of age — a figure never seen before at any time in history. We have an historic global opportunity, because we have a demographic bonus that should be used. In Mexico, young people comprise a third of the total population. Together with the largest countries in Latin America, we have demographic bonus that we should take advantage of in order to build and strengthen the political, economic and social infrastructure that we need.

Knowledge and access to better jobs is the largest responsibility. The foundation for work is knowledge, and that will be even more the case in the future. Our educational systems are therefore based on this perspective — perhaps not enough, but at least the pedagogical models are being revised, and that process should be deepened.

This is one of the big challenges of our generation: to prepare ourselves to fully live in the knowledge era, but above all to guarantee access to knowledge and the right to information for each person wherever he or she might be.

It is true that we, the young people, have to think of the future while living in the present. It is thus essential that from the demographic bonus to which we have already referred we must also be able to generate a financial culture sustained by savings so that social security systems are capable of supporting the demand that we will have in the future.

The key element of our efforts should be to create spaces for active and effective participation of young people in all areas that affect them. In the case of my country, the National Institute of Youth of Mexico promotes the youth perspective in the action of the Government. Above all, it promotes the participation of youth. In the last four years, we have actively encouraged over a thousand projects of youth organizations. At the multilateral level, Mexico has been part of Youth Delegates programme since 2004. The premise is simple: we need to build a joint agenda with the young people, and not impose a fixed view.

Mexico considers it essential to tackle and achieve the Millennium Development Goals and subsequent agreements in areas related to the development of youth. That will enable the results to be sustainable in the medium- and long term.

For this reason my country reaffirms its commitment to the World Programme of Action for Youth and its effective implementation. We are confident that the Secretary-General will present in the report requested in this Meeting's outcome document (resolution 65/312) specific proposals to follow up on the 15 areas of action and the measures that can be taken to strengthen the work of the United Nations system for youth.

The International Year of Youth, which will end in a few days, has enabled us to give greater visibility to the needs and challenges that young people face today. In recent months, various activities and events on youth were carried out on all levels. The Government of Mexico, working with the United Nations system, contributed to this effort by organizing the World Youth Conference, which was held in August 2010 in León, Guanajuato, Mexico. The Conference was attended by 106 delegates and nearly 4,000 young people. It promoted a dialogue between Government, civil society and youth organizations.

The world will be what its youth will be — we reap what we sow. It is time to stop understanding youth as a physical state and start seeing it with a vision of ongoing life. It is time to return to taking decisions thinking of the present and future generations. It is time for us to put the person and his essence at the centre of public policies. It is time to take the best of our past to build the best of our future and make a better place to live.

The President (*spoke in French*): Let me remind the Assembly that each Member State has three minutes in which to speak when taking the floor. If the text of a prepared statement is longer than that, it should be adapted to fit into this time limit, as that will allow for a maximum number of Member States to take the floor.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sofia Pain, Chief of Intergovernmental Relations and the Promotion of International Activity at the Ministry of Youth of Italy.

Ms. Pain (Italy): First of all, I wish to join the other speakers in expressing our condolences to the Government and the people of Norway.

Italy endorses the statement that will be delivered by the European Union and wishes to make a few additional remarks.

Dialogue and mutual understanding are crucial to the positive development of our societies, as they contribute to political, social, cultural and economic integration and to the cohesion of those who are culturally diverse. Young people can play an important role in further promoting cooperation, participation, tolerance and respect for others in every region of the world. The World Programme of Action for Youth is a fundamental point of reference at the international level to achieve those goals.

For these reasons, Italy attaches great importance to the development of young generations in terms of their potential, their personal and professional skills and their ability to actively participate in social life. This is demonstrated by the presence of two representatives of the National Youth Forum in the Italian delegation at this Meeting.

Currently, the unemployment, poverty and social exclusion linked to the ongoing world financial crisis are serious barriers to the active participation of young people in society, especially for those in vulnerable situations or at risk of exclusion. The Italian Government — also thanks to the action of a young Minister of Youth — has taken steps to offer more opportunities for professional growth. They include more effective coordination and integration among the sectors of education, training and the labour market; the adoption of mechanisms to finance young entrepreneurs for business start-ups, especially in the new technologies and green sectors; investments in training; and orientation for students.

The Italian Government is thus promoting various initiatives that offer young people crucial knowledge about civic duties and opportunities for active participation in democratic life. This is key to the development of dialogue and mutual understanding in civil society, and it echoes the main theme of this International Year of Youth.

A greater role can be played by non-formal and informal learning opportunities offered to young people by youth, volunteer and non-governmental organizations. Joint action with United Nations and European bodies should have as their main goal the concrete development of quality, standardized, non-formal and informal learning. We believe that the prerequisites for dialogue and mutual understanding must be learned, practiced and maintained all our lives.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Bianka Paola Hernández, Director of the National Council of Youth of Guatemala.

Ms. Hernández (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Guatemala is one of the slowest countries in Latin America in terms of its demographic transition. The cohort from birth to 14 years of age makes up 31.8 per cent of our total population, compared to an average of 20.8 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Those aged between 15 and 24 — those whom we consider as "youth" — make up another 19.8 per cent of the total population. While the relative percentage of Guatemalans from birth to 14 years is tending to fall over time, which is to be expected at this stage of our transition, the opposite is true of the 15-to-24-year-old segment, which is increasing.

These phenomena are having a profound impact on our current health and education services, as well as noticeable repercussions for the labour markets and Guatemalans' quality of life. Today, Guatemala's economy simply does not generate sufficient jobs to absorb our young people. While we have made a great deal of progress in improving the reach and quality of our educational system, we are still not keeping enough young people in that system, including at the secondary level.

The present Administration has tried to deal with this situation in the widest context, by giving the highest priority to assisting the lowest-income and most vulnerable strata of the population. The emphasis has been on generating productive jobs, particularly in small and medium-sized businesses, with the goal of offering a better future to those students who leave or drop out of the educational system and seek to enter the job market without resorting to emigration. We have also launched a series of initiatives focused on Guatemala's young people through the National Council for Youth, which I have the honour to lead, and which is the institution charged with coordinating, proposing and promoting public policies for youth.

Since the present Administration began, the Government of Guatemala has promoted social policies capable of achieving concrete transformations in the reality of life for young Guatemalans, based on solidarity and generating creative and innovative programmes such as Open Schools, Safe Schools, Solidarity Scholarships and Civil Service, among others. The Open Schools presidential programme offers alternative spaces for weekend activities for young people that promote identity and a sense of belonging. Based on a non-formal education model, these transform traditional schools into spaces that allow the exchange of experiences through the development and discovery of young people's diverse capacities.

These and other efforts are built around the National Youth Policy 2010-2015, "Building a multicultural, inclusive and equitable nation", which responds to the particular demands of young people in their quest for opportunity and for economic, political and social development. That plan conforms fully to the World Programme of Action for Youth set out in resolution 50/81, which, though adopted in 1995, is still very relevant.

Aware of the importance of investing in young people and giving them the opportunity and the scope to take on appropriate leadership roles, at this High-level Meeting on Youth we as a country would like to bring about agreement on development with equity and with equal conditions and without discrimination. We must build collectively and with participation, taking the necessary steps for sustained support of Governments and of every sector, so as to create integrated policies and actions that continue to invest in young people in order to create more and better opportunities.

Lastly, we recognize that young people want to belong, to participate and to be actors in their own history. There must be mutual dialogue and an understanding that includes young people and recognizes them as actors in their own process of development and as fully entitled to share in opportunities for access and genuine conditions for participation.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Jan Vanhee, Director of the International Youth Policy Support Center of Belgium.

Mr. Vanhee (Belgium): We offer our condolences to the people and State of Norway.

Belgium associates itself with the statement of the European Union.

After this High-level Meeting on Youth, there will be no way back with regard to taking young men and women seriously in our societies. We must create structures and mechanisms at all levels, from neighbourhoods to municipalities, to regions and nations, and even internationally, in order to advance and strengthen as much as possible young people's participation in the decision-making processes that affect them. Independent youth councils are a good and sustainable example. This was mentioned yesterday in a discussion between our colleagues from the European Youth Forum and various other countries.

It is time to act. Even in these difficult days, we must examine how we can strengthen our support and contribute financially to youth structures and organizations at all levels.

There is still a long way to go in improving the participation and development of young people. We are convinced that the more we do, the better it will be for the quality of our governance. For example, in the Youth Department of the Council of Europe — which is a structure linking the youth sector and governmental bodies having shared possibilities in the youth field — we see how co-management is functioning. We are also trying to implement structured dialogue in the European Union. These are good examples.

Nevertheless, there are some critical issues to be solved, such as the recognition of youth organizations, youth non-governmental organizations, youth work and a non-formal education sector. We have to recognize that young people are an integral part of an increasingly complex society. They are shaped by a variety of influences and environments: the home, families, communities, school, the workplace, peers and the media. In that context, youth work can play an important role in young people's development and participation. We must also focus more energy on involving young people who live in poverty and/or at risk of social exclusion.

Youth policy and youth development should also be knowledge- and evidence-based. We have to make more joint efforts to build a real and strong youth coalition at all levels, all over the world, together with young people, youth organizations, workers, leaders, researchers, policymakers and other experts in the field of youth, as well as the private and third sectors.

Our thanks go to you, Mr. President, and to your colleagues, for making this meeting possible. We hope that there will soon be another at which there will be more places, space and opportunities to share our aims and opinions with young people and their organizations. I hope that we can work together to guarantee the implementation and follow-up of this outcome document (resolution 65/312) and of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Benson Saulo, Youth Ambassador for Australia.

Mr. Saulo (Australia): As the 2011 Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, it gives me great pleasure to represent the views, hopes and optimism of the youth of Australia in today's discussion. I am the first Aboriginal Australian to be appointed as the Youth Representative since the position began in 1999. It is not only a great honour but a wonderful reflection on the young people of Australia, who want to promote and support an inclusive and equal society.

I am proud to say that Australian youth and the Australian Government share a common vision, which is reflected in the commitments laid out in our National Strategy for Young Australians:

> "for all young people grow up safe, healthy, happy and resilient and to have the opportunities and skills they need to learn, work, engage in community life and influence decisions that affect them".

Our National Strategy identifies eight key priorities. Health, education and empowering young people to have a voice and be active in their communities are some of the key issues.

I am a firm believer that access to relevant, formal, informal and alternate education is key to address areas that continue to affect Australian youth in all areas of society, including overcoming disadvantage and influencing the current and future direction of our nation.

In the recent "Listen to Children" report produced by UNICEF Australia, it is noted that

> "there are specific groups of children who are not always afforded the same educational opportunities as other students, denying the capacity to fulfil their potential. These groups include: Aboriginal children; ... children from refugee and newly arrived backgrounds; ... and children with a disability."

During my national tour, I visited a small school in a remote town in Northern Territory, a part of Australia that has particular focus on closing the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in the key indicators of life expectancy, employment and educational outcomes. The principal walked me around the school and informed me that no student had graduated from high school in that town for the past seven years. As we continued, he then pointed out three young girls and a young male, in year eight. He said that those four students had the potential to be the first in their school — the first in their town — to graduate from school and break the cycle of disadvantage within the town.

Beyond our shores, Australia is focused on supporting education programmes throughout Asia, the Pacific and the world, including a strong focus on disabilities. In our region, Australia provides support for the transition from primary to secondary schooling for children with hearing impairment and intellectual disabilities. We are also producing disability inclusion infrastructure guidelines for schools.

The UNICEF "Listen to Children" report also recommended that Australia establish an independent National Commissioner with the specific responsibility of setting up the strategic direction for youth-based policy development. That will be the next big step for Australia and will ensure that young people's voices are heard and that youth services are adequately resourced and implemented. The National Commissioner for Children will also complement the youth peak bodies and youth forums currently engaging young people and advocating on their behalf.

While there are many challenges and obstacles that face young people today, a sense of optimism for the future is evident. I encourage each Member State to continue strengthening dialogue with the youth in their nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ms. Lee Bok Sil, Assistant Minister, Youth and Family Policy Office of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Lee Bok Sil (Republic of Korea): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea, I would like to offer my deepest condolences to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Norway and to their families. The Republic of Korea strongly condemns the violence that took away innocent young lives and expresses solidarity with the people of Norway.

We are here today at this crucial gathering to ensure the best interests of youth. My delegation believes that through this High-level Meeting political leadership will be strengthened to take further steps towards the full implementation of international strategies, including the 1995 World Programme of Action for Youth.

My delegation is of the view that full and effective participation of young people in decision-making processes contributes not only to the empowerment of their political capacity but also to sustainable socio-economic development. In this connection, the Korean Government provides institutional foundations for young people to directly join the decision-making process and to present policy proposals by operating the 430 Youth Participation Committee at the local level and the Youth Special Conferences at the national level. My Government also continues to dispatch youth representatives to the General Assembly and other United Nations entities to further facilitate communication between young people and the United Nations system.

Recognizing the need to take a comprehensive approach toward youth issues, the Korean Government has launched a series of initiatives under the Master Plan for Youth Policy, which is updated every five years. The Plan, which is implemented by all relevant ministries and local authorities under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, encompasses various policy areas including human rights, education, employment and welfare.

We also believe that the role of civil society, youth-led organizations and the partnership among relevant stakeholders should be considered vital in protecting young-people from violence and crime and in fostering a youth-friendly society. For that reason, my Government enforces youth policies in addressing the alarming increase in Internet addiction among youth, in collaboration with civil society and the media.

My delegation fully supports the development of indicators linked to the World Programme of Action for Youth and the proposed goals and targets. We are convinced that they could play a critical role in evaluating the current situation and in designing a concrete action plan for youth. Furthermore, such development will contribute to the overall progress towards internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

We expect that the future-oriented strategies put forward in this Meeting will be transferred into reality in the coming years, bringing visible changes in development and in quality of life, not only for young people but also for society as a whole. My Government would like to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to continuously participate in the international efforts for the development of youth, in close cooperation with the United Nations and other Member States.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ignacio Naudon, Director of the National Institute for Youth of Chile.

Mr. Naudon (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset I would like to convey to the delegation of Norway the deepest condolences of the youth of Chile for the massacre in their country last weekend.

Despite our countries' efforts, in almost all of our countries youth remains the population group most beset by social problems. Young people are the most affected by unemployment, abuse of alcohol and drugs and unplanned pregnancy, among others. There are doubtless many reasons to explain this reality, but today I would like to address one of them: the limited participation of our young people in our political systems.

Figures show that in general, the group that participates the least in decision-making processes is young people. Very few young people participate in our political parties, form part of our Governments or vote in our elections.

That separation between young people and politics is partly due to a generation's deep mistrust of political systems that at times are not able to effectively take up its views and positions. Such systems often reduce young people to mere beneficiaries of public policy and do not acknowledge them as participants. Many times these systems focus on protecting weaknesses but do little in capacity-building. The result is that the low level of participation of young people means inadequate reflection of their issues and concerns in public policy priorities, and thus a lack of concrete solutions and responses.

Therefore, if we truly wish to solve the issues facing young people, any social initiative that we undertake must be accompanied by an aggressive policy of promoting participation. It is unthinkable to claim, and to believe, that youth issues can enter and, above all, remain the priority of public policy unless we make progress in resolutely promoting the incorporation of young people into our political systems.

When I say promote participation, I am not merely referring to forming bodies to hear views. I mean full and effective participation in drawing up, implementing and evaluating public policies. In other words, our generation does not want youth parliaments, but to participate in real parliaments, where real laws are drawn up.

Let us not make the mistake of reducing youth policies only to resolving issues affecting young people. That approach is doomed to failure.

To conclude, I call on our generation to uphold politics as the place where great changes take place. And if politics does not always function as we wish or does not have all the space that we would like, let us not stand by. Let us act. Let us be the agents of change and let us create the space.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Matías Rodriguez, Director of the National Institute of Youth of the Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay.

Mr. Rodríguez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Uruguay, it is truly a pleasure to be participating in this world conference on youth.

I too would like to express our condolences on the unfortunate events in Norway.

In our country, some of the most worrisome and alarming social indicators of our society have historically been concentrated in the youngest generations. The main issues or challenges that the Uruguayan youth still face are those linked to the reduction of youth poverty, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and education, in particular, improving education sustainability, reintegration and completion of education cycles.

Related challenges are reducing the rate of youth unemployment, as well as improving training opportunities, vocational training and placement in decent jobs. Despite Uruguay's growing economy, there is high youth unemployment. It is triple the overall unemployment rate and is strongly evident in the group aged 18 to 24 years.

With great pride, we can also note that that trend has begun to reverse since the beginning of 2005. Since then, the main challenge has been and continues to be making progress in reconfiguring a new social protection matrix and strengthening a modern social assistance and inclusion network. The process allowed for a clear redirection of social public spending towards the youngest generations. That was seen in the increase in the education budget to 4.5 per cent of gross domestic product and through the implementation of a body of reforms, such as the equity plan, health-care reform, tax reform and the new family allowance system.

In that context, we have drawn up and launched the implementation of the National Youth Plan. That Plan clearly sets out four priorities: first, linking inclusion and education sustainability; secondly, improving training opportunities and employment; thirdly, promoting the participation, leading role and training of young people; and fourthly, promoting coordinated and linked youth policies, applying the youth perspective across all policy sectors.

While thus noting challenges and problems facing young people, it is also possible to say that in our country, there are thousands of young people who study, work, practice sports, pursue science, participate in cultural and artistic programmes and devote hours of their lives developing solidarity, defending rights and protecting the environment.

Clearly, as actors linked to youth policies, we all have a huge role to play in overcoming the problems and obstacles facing young people in order to ensure their development, as well as their enormous capacity to build responses that guarantee the exercise of their full rights. However, we must also focus on the social and emblematic place that we give young people in our societies.

Currently in Uruguay, we are seeing a strong conservative campaign that seeks to portray young people in the worst light, associating them only with threats, fear, crime, drugs and violence. That paradigm has led to iron-fist projects, doomed to fail, to ensure supposed safety. Such proposals are expensive, ineffective, counterproductive and regressive from a human rights perspective, as they violate the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example.

We are absolutely convinced that societies that fear and do not believe in or trust young people, or simply do not expect anything from them, are doomed to fail because they lose the creativity, innovation, sense of transformation and commitment of young people.

For all those reasons, we hope and are convinced that this world meeting on youth will greatly help to bring about a new political agenda that will make it possible to improve the position of public policies on youth, budgets, institution-building and strategic plans. However, above all, we reaffirm that in public policies relating to young people there is no place for mistrust and fear of youth, but only for the leading role, trust and participation of young people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Miguel Angel Pereira, Executive Director of the National Council of Youth of El Salvador.

Mr. Pereira (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to convey a very special greeting from El Salvador to all young people from all over the world who are at this High-level Meeting or who are tuning in through the Internet or various media. In addition, we wish to loudly applaud each of them in their countries, every young person of each country who is tuning in or is at this meeting, to ensure that each leader is sitting down to discuss public youth policies that we should implement. Each should commit to truly developing policies to integrate young people in society.

In El Salvador, we are working on a national youth policy, drawn up by grassroots youth organizations with the participation of more than 8,000 young people from all municipalities that comprise our dear El Salvador.

In reality, as a Government, we recognize that the greatest wealth of Latin America, in particular El Salvador, is not gold or oil. It is the young people of the entire world, who today make up our well-known demographic asset and of whom we Governments can take advantage.

I would also like to underscore that the Government of El Salvador recently established the National Council of Youth, within which, on the instruction of the President of the Republic, Mauricio Funes Cartagena, a Council of Ministers was established to exclusively address youth issues. I dare say that we are the only country in Latin America where there is a council of ministers to exclusively address youth issues.

If truth be told, we are working hard to change those policies that are too heavy-handed, in order to move towards policies with an intelligent touch that address youth affairs from a rights-based approach, but that also identify young people as the real strategic actors for development in our country and — why not say it? — globally.

The question we should ask ourselves, as policymakers for young people, is, in terms of this High-level Meeting, what will they get out of it? What will be the concrete proposal that we, the Governments, can take home to our countries?

As a representative of the Government of El Salvador, I will take the Secretary-General at his word when he said yesterday (110th meeting) that much has been done for young people, but that it is still not enough. And since it is not enough, we, the Government of El Salvador, recognize that today we must definitively support young people, and the best way to do that is through education. For that reason it is important that we see the creation within the United Nations system of a fund or programme for scholarships for the poorest countries or the poorest young people, whom of course we see in all our countries.

In El Salvador, we are focusing on young people as the centre of our social policies. And we will continue to do so, with the help of God, with an intelligent touch, with the wisdom of our President, Don Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Amos Issac, Under Secretary General at the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of Niger.

Mr. Issac (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join other delegations who have spoken before me in offering to the Government and people of Norway our condolences on the tragedy they have experienced.

I would like to thank Their Excellencies Mr. Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou and Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, the Permanent Representatives of, respectively, Benin and Austria, the facilitators of this meeting, who have worked so hard to ensure our success.

Most of the studies of the formulation and implementation of national youth policies agree that the majority of Niger's population is young. Due to its demographic weight, this stratum of society is one of the fundamental resources for the sustainable construction and development of our country. Niger is working on its social and economic paradigms, since the highest authorities are more convinced than ever that young people are not the problem but rather the solution to our economic and social development.

Moreover, this situation has had the corollary result of the creation in Niger of a collaborative framework conducive to involving young people in the development process, through the creation in 2006 of the National Council for Youth and its regional branches, which can be seen to have brought real momentum to this area. An inter-ministerial technical committee for youth affairs has been established, and we have implemented a process of decentralization and transfer of the management of socio-educational structures for young people to local communities.

These efforts to respond to young people's various concerns are the result of the political will of the Niger authorities, the adoption of the National Charter for Youth, and the Youth Policy Declaration. Through this new youth policy, the Government has reaffirmed its willingness to ensure the fulfilment of young people's material and intellectual needs. The national youth policy is the Government's political demonstration of its effort to create a guiding instrument for the long-term that can promote the emergence and support of a generation of young people who are the true engines of the country's development.

Thus article 24 of the Niger Constitution states that young people are protected by the State and other public institutions from exploitation and abandonment. The State provides for young people's material and intellectual growth as well as promoting their training and employment and their entry into the job market.

In this regard, we have taken the following actions based on the strategic plan and youth employment promotion programme. We have established the management and executive bodies for a strategic national plan. We have strengthened the capacity of youth frameworks in the area of management and administration of socio-educational institutions and strengthened the capacities of young people in management of their associations and organizations. We have implemented the youth employment promotion programme with a view to creating 50,000 jobs by 2015 and have strengthened the plan for promoting entrepreneurship among young people.

Those are some of the important elements of the Government of Niger's actions concerning young people that we wished to share with all the participants here today.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Ricardo Ibarra, Adviser at the National Youth Institute of Spain.

Mr. Ibarra (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour for us to participate in this meeting.

This International Year has shown that there are many opportunities for young people. At the same time we have seen that the challenges we must confront are even greater. Young people face the highest levels of poverty and unemployment and the greatest difficulty in accessing education, health care and culture resources, and there are very high levels of other indicators of problems. We can definitely say that they are living in precarious situations. These circumstances have worsened as the result of an economic and financial crisis that has largely affected young people. It is something that must not happen again, and it is therefore necessary to regulate the flow of international capital.

It is important that in order to transform these circumstances, Governments and civil society must affirm their commitment to the absolute necessity of creating effective youth policies, not just because they affect a significant part of the population, but also because they are crucial to building our future societies. Betting on young people is a double investment, since it is both an investment in our present and, above all, in our future.

Fostering the participation of young people is also essential. Participation becomes a powerful tool for helping our youth policies succeed and is also an end in itself, since it allows us to develop youth groups that will foster the practice and learning essential to an active democratic society.

But for youth to participate they must not merely have the opportunity, they must also have the necessary training. We must therefore work on participation through education in informal as well as formal settings. This requires greater support and recognition of informal settings.

We must create a culture of participation that begins in early childhood, participation that requires the ability to form opinions and the ability to make decisions, to execute and evaluate. We must develop structures that channel young people and increase dialogue with civil society, such as those in the European Union, through structured dialogue among youth leaders and political leaders.

Above all, Governments must continue to build and contribute to the strengthening of civil society and the development of representative platforms such as the independent national youth councils. Such structures allow young people to voice their problems, but also to offer solutions and be involved in implementing them.

As I said at the start, there are many challenges that we must address when we discuss young people. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include many challenges that affect young people. Since it is cross-cutting, I would like to mention MDG 3 — the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Young people in general tend to live in unjust situations, but it is young females who suffer the most. Women are essential and fundamental actors in the pursuit of the MDGs, and are often the most affected when the Goals are not met. If we focus on achieving progress and true equality for women, we will achieve results in all the other MDGs. Efforts to ensure the rights of women must be accompanied by a formal recognition of the rights of youth, as has happened in Africa and Ibero-America, inter alia.

I wish to conclude by reiterating Spain's commitment to improving the quality of life for youth, its congratulations to all stakeholders involved in this undertaking, and its hope that we will continue to work on this key issue.

Finally, we would like to express our condolences to the people of Norway in connection with the recent tragedy they experienced.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Teddy Mulonga, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Sport, Youth and Child Development of Zambia.

Mr. Mulonga (Zambia): The Government and the people of the Republic of Zambia express their condolences to the Government and the people of Norway on the tragic incident that led to the loss of lives, including those of young people. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families.

Zambia is pleased to participate in this important High-level Meeting, whose theme, "Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding," provides us with an opportunity to share ideas and exchange views on the challenges facing young people.

My delegation in this regard aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the representative of Rwanda on behalf of the African Union, and the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community.

The Zambian Government considers young people to be the foundation of sustainable development. Therefore, the development and utilization of human youth capital is imperative in order to build the necessary capital for youth to become productive adults in society. Accordingly, the Government has designed policies and programmes which focus on youth empowerment and investment in young people.

Sixty-eight per cent of Zambia's population is below the age of 35. Like youth anywhere else, they continue to face a number of challenges, including inadequate employment opportunities; limited access to finance for investment; HIV/AIDS; and inadequate skills training opportunities.

In order to address existing challenges, the Government is implementing the following programmes: the promotion of youth entrepreneurship through a micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises development policy, which seeks to develop the micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises sector for wealth and employment creation; and the enactment of comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence and the development of protocols to facilitate the implementation of a national action plan on women, girls and HIV and AIDS.

The Zambian Government has recognized the important need to establish programmes for out-of-school youths. Accordingly, we have embarked on a vigorous programme of youth skills training and development in order to enable young people to acquire life and vocational skills, and thus improved livelihoods, through the construction of trades training institutes and youth skills resource centres.

Young people in Zambia face many challenges in accessing financial support from lending institutions. Thus the Zambian Government is committed to promoting enterprise development for wealth and employment creation for young people, and to this effect it established a Youth Development Fund. The fund targets young men and women, disabled youth and those affected by HIV and AIDS, at concessionary rates.

No longer can Governments afford to devise a development agenda that addresses the concerns of young people without their participation. To this end, Zambia has introduced provincial youth indabas and appointed youths to various decision-making bodies. This has proved to be an effective way of engaging young people in national development.

It is clear that although there has been progress in addressing issues concerning youth, much remains to be done. It is important that the international community address key areas affecting youth, including the creation of a United Nations agency specializing in youth affairs so as to give more attention to youth issues; the prioritization of education, health, employment and resource allocation to youth programmes; and the strengthening of Government structures at all levels to enhance the implementation of youth programmes.

I wish to reiterate that our future depends on our finding appropriate interventions that tackle the challenges affecting our youth. It is our hope that this High-level Meeting will enhance our previous commitments to the youth development agenda and ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to this end. We hope that the outcome document (resolution 65/312) that we have adopted will further galvanize our efforts to achieve our common goals.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Iman Usman, youth representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Usman (Indonesia): Mr. President, on behalf of the people, in particular the young people, and the Government of my country, let me begin by saying that we share the grief and pain of the people and the Government of Norway over the heinous act of terror that took place last week, causing many bright young Norwegians to lose their lives. We would like to convey our deepest sympathy and condolences to the Government and the people of Norway and the bereaved families over their tragic loss.

At the outset, Indonesia would like to align itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Argentina on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Earlier this year, the United Nations Population Commission reported that the world population is now close to 7 billion. I should like to underline that nearly half of that population is under the age of 25. This reality holds both great potential and multiple challenges. The challenges are closely connected to the world's capacity to sustain human life, given the numbers involved. Can the Earth's available resources provide each of us with greater prosperity?

As we gather here today, we are reminded that young people today face the obstacles of famine, poverty, drug-related crimes, armed conflict and foreign occupation, among other things, in realizing their potential. Against that background, we cannot but enhance our cooperation in addressing these challenges, which young people throughout the world are facing.

This historic High-level Meeting is therefore timely and crucial, because youth are the stakeholders of the immediate future in all societies. They are the custodians of the world's cultures, traditions and norms, as well as the engine of global change. They represent boundless energy and potential as future leaders.

Young people constitute a quarter of the population of Indonesia. They have always played, and will continue to play, an important role in our history. It was the youth of Indonesia who shaped our national identity, and, in the late 1990s, initiated our journey towards democracy and political transformation.

We are of the view that youth employment and entrepreneurship will contribute to poverty eradication. We therefore need to collaborate in the process of finding ways to decrease unemployment among young people. We must invest in sectors that generate jobs for them. We must also work towards a global network for youth employment.

In this spirit, Indonesia will spare no effort in promoting the role and contributions of youth in the area of development. We believe that education is of the utmost importance in equipping young people to shape and take control of the future. Indonesia will continue to pursue the goal of providing young people with a sound education.

As part of our regional and global commitments, we have been hosting regional and international conferences on youth to increase awareness and promote cultural diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding among youth. As Chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2011, Indonesia is determined to make ASEAN a more people-centred organization, with the full participation of our young people.

The primary responsibility for ensuring youth development lies with individual States. However, one of the key assets for successful national endeavours is international cooperation. Cooperation among international stakeholders is vital in contributing to youth programmes in all participating nations. Through cooperation, nations can exchange information about best practices and lessons learned, as well as intensify active support for youth programmes.

In this context, the outcome document that we adopted today (resolution 65/312) should encourage all of us to not only reaffirm our strong commitment to the shared objective of building a better world for all, but also to make tangible contributions to improving the prospects of young people.

Let me conclude by underlining the importance of synchronizing our policies and actions so that we can better translate our joint commitment into concrete actions in ways that benefit future generations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Mr. Serrano (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

In the interest of time, I am reading an abridged version of the text.

It is heartening to see so many young people and high-level representatives from around the world gathered here today, determined to improve the conditions of the world's youth and to open more avenues for them to shape their own and our common future. As many speakers have stated before me, too many young women and men live in poverty, suffer from poor health, lack basic education and employment and have no real opportunity to shape their own lives and their societies. In view of that, at this High-level Meeting on Youth, we need to reaffirm our commitment to investing in and empowering young women and men.

The European Union welcomes the fact that the outcome document of this High-level Meeting (resolution 65/312) solidly reaffirms the World Programme of Action for Youth and calls for its continued implementation at the local, national, regional and international levels. We also believe that the exchange of good practice best serves our common interest to advance the cause of young people, particularly the poor and marginalized.

Very much in parallel with international developments in this field, the European Union and its member States have incrementally developed specific policies addressed at young people and adopted a designated youth strategy in 2009. European Union youth policy is guided by key principles, notably that cooperation in this area should be firmly anchored in the international system of universal and indivisible human rights — a principle that is also valid in the United Nations context. The full enjoyment by young people of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is an integral part of the effective implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. The EU and its member States are also committed to research-based policymaking and receive input from young people in a twice-yearly structured dialogue with youth and youth organizations.

In order to create more and equal opportunities for young people, we have developed a number of specific programmes and practical tools. For example, the Youth in Action programme aims to inspire a sense of active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance among young Europeans. It promotes mobility, non-formal learning, youth work, volunteering, intercultural dialogue and inclusion. The priority field of action "Youth in the World" is designed to support young people's participation in and contribution to global initiatives, such as the fight against climate change and the Millennium Development Goals. It is an important agenda point for the presidency of Poland of the Council of the European Union.

Successful programmes for young people extend beyond the borders of the European Union. Erasmus Mundus, the global version of our Erasmus programme, aims at enhancing quality in higher education through scholarships and academic cooperation. In addition to those specific programmes, we also increasingly focus on youth issues in our general cooperation and dialogue. Many of the development activities of our partners, supported by the EU and its member States, benefit young people. We also promote the inclusion of young women and girls as equal partners in development, as this is essential in overcoming gender imbalances and promoting gender equality.

In closing, let me commend the focus on youth participation at this conference. We all need not only to give a voice to young people, but also to allow them and youth-led organizations to participate in the development, implementation and follow-up of policies relevant to youth. In light of this, we would like to encourage Member States to include youth representatives in their delegations to relevant United Nations meetings.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Kodama (Japan): I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his initiative in convening this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to express Japan's deepest condolences and sympathy to the Government and people of Norway, as well as to the families of the victims of Friday's bombing and shooting, which deprived many young people of their precious lives.

The earthquake and tsunami that struck eastern Japan in March this year caused enormous human and material losses. Let me reiterate our gratitude for all the assistance and solidarity of the international community. I would like to take this opportunity to report the encouraging fact that a lot of young people have volunteered to help in the reconstruction of their devastated communities.

Today's young people are our future. They will be expected to solve the challenges we leave unmet. Therefore, we are responsible for addressing the challenges young people face today and for improving conditions for future generations. Allow me to speak about some of the challenges young people face today, as well as the issues to be addressed by the international community.

First, we reaffirm the World Programme of Action for Youth. We stress the necessity of implementing the Programme and of achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Secondly, we believe that we must increase the participation of young people in society. At the international level, the Government of Japan has been implementing several exchange programmes, including multinational activities like study-abroad-at-sea programmes, and bilateral activities, such as home-stay and international discussion programmes, which allow young people from various countries and the youth of Japan to meet, live and work together, thereby enhancing mutual understanding between the youth of Japan and the global community. At the national level, Japan has created opportunities for our young people to participate in volunteer activities within their communities.

Thirdly, eradicating poverty is a priority issue of Japan's official development assistance (ODA). We especially recognize the vulnerability of girls and young women. In this context, I stress the importance of addressing the issue of youth unemployment, which is crucial not only to peacebuilding and development, but also to maintaining social stability in every country in the world. As we have observed in the recent developments in the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, we should remind ourselves that employment provides a sense of security and pride, allowing a young person to begin his or her life as a full-fledged member of society.

Mindful of our responsibility to ensure employment for all youth around the world, we in Japan support human and social development, as well as increased employment and sustainable economic growth in developing countries. The basic policy of Japan's ODA emphasizes human security for every individual. Japan therefore contributes aid, both bilaterally and through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to thank the co-facilitators for their perseverance in coordinating the outcome document (resolution 65/312) for this meeting.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria): Let me first of all express my deep-felt condolences to the people and Government of Norway for the terrible calamity that they have suffered in recent days — a calamity that caused the deaths of so many young people striving for dialogue and mutual understanding.

I also thank you, Mr. President, for the confidence you have placed in me and my country by appointing me as co-facilitator to the negotiation process of the outcome document (resolution 65/312) of this important High-level Meeting on Youth. I would also like to thank my co-facilitator and friend, Ambassador Jean-Francis Régis Zinsou of Benin, for his outstanding cooperation throughout the process, and the Secretariat, for its great support. However, what has been achieved in this document, adopted today by consensus, is the work not of the co-facilitators but of the Member States, and it would not have been possible without the dedication and constructive attitude of so many delegations.

In the outcome document, the international community speaks with one voice on important issues affecting youth, such as gender equality; education, including human rights education; employment; health, including sexual and reproductive health; armed conflict; information and communication technology; migration; protection from all forms of violence; and the environment. The document builds on and consolidates existing achievements, in particular by reaffirming the World Programme of Action for Youth, and calls upon Member States to continue its implementation at the various levels. It also initiates further reflection on how to even more effectively address the challenges that hinder the development and participation of youth in a forward-looking way.

The theme of this High-level Meeting, "Youth: dialogue and mutual understanding", occupies a central role in Austria's domestic policy, in particular in the initiatives we undertake that are focused on the promotion of tolerance, integration, gender equality and human rights education. In our activities within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations, we place particular emphasis on youth and women, and we have organized and will organize a number of important events in this context. We are currently preparing the second Arab-European Young Leaders Forum and we will continue this approach.

One message of this important Meeting should be very clear — there can be nothing about youth without youth. As reiterated in the outcome document, the full and effective participation of young people in decision-making processes at all levels is key to everything that we hope to achieve for them. Any meaningful dialogue or policy to improve the situation of youth also requires full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. For this, Governments bear the primary responsibility.

Youth movements around the world have clearly demonstrated that most obstacles that hinder youth development are rooted in disrespect for and the violation of the human rights of young people, in particular of girls and young women, as well as of young people belonging to marginalized or vulnerable groups. The opportunity presented by this High-level Meeting to understand and address these aspirations and demands of young people should not be missed.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now give the floor to the co-Chairs of the round tables of the High-level Meeting to submit their summaries. I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ajay Maken, Minister for Youth Affairs of India, who co-chaired thematic panel 1.

Mr. Maken (India): I would like to make a brief presentation of the discussion that took place in panel 1, which we held yesterday under my co-chairmanship. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Miguel Ángel Carreón Sánchez, Director of the National Institute of Youth of Mexico, for co-facilitating the discussion with me.

The panel discussion focused on strengthening international cooperation regarding youth and enhancing dialogue, mutual understanding and active youth participation as indispensable elements of efforts towards achieving social integration, full employment and the eradication of poverty.

We had a very fruitful interaction that involved not only representatives of Member States but several young people from civil society organizations. We are very grateful for their lively participation and valuable inputs. There was a general agreement that the issue of youth development needed more concerted international cooperation on the part of us all.

Let me highlight some of the salient observations made during the panel discussion that enjoyed the broad support of various speakers. There is a strong need for Governments to further integrate youth issues in their national development agendas, in close collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. The role of international cooperation in this regard is very important.

There was agreement that promoting dialogue is essential to mutual understanding among young people, their Governments and other stakeholders worldwide. The crucial task is to ensure the full inclusion of young people in social, economic and political life. The internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, cannot be achieved without the full participation of young people. Enhanced youth participation requires engaging with young people and youth-led organizations as full partners in decision-making processes.

There is also a need to develop genuine mechanisms for the active participation of youth in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes. That would also involve creating effective channels of cooperation, dialogue and information exchange among young people, their national Governments and other relevant decision makers.

The full participation of youth will not be possible if the development challenges that youth face — including social exclusion, unemployment, underemployment, lack of decent work opportunities, poverty, and the lack of skills — are not addressed. Efforts must be made to improve the quality of education and to promote access to education, including non-formal education and health services.

Acquiring capacities and skills is critical to young people if they are to better integrate into society. New technologies hold tremendous promise, and young people are adept at utilizing them. Access to these technologies is important. Information and communication technologies must be made more widely available to all young people to overcome the digital divide.

The positive effects of globalization must be reaped by the youth of today. The issue of international migration is a critical component in this regard. It deserves greater discussion in international forums in the context of the free movement of young people across borders.

While many issues are common to all young people, those most vulnerable, especially those with disabilities, indigenous youth, youth migrants and young women, face additional challenges and multiple forms of discrimination. Adolescents have distinct needs that should also be addressed. Targeted efforts are required to reach all vulnerable young people and ensure their full participation.

Laws and policies should create an enabling environment for youth participation. Programmatic efforts should focus on their empowerment and inclusion, not merely on consultation with them. These aspects should be developed at all levels, with focus on the engagement of young people at the community and local levels, where they have a lot of quality inputs to make and where they can develop the skills and experience that will enable them to participate more meaningfully in a more socially and economically productive manner.

We need to provide greater space in the media and other outreach mechanisms to display a more positive image of young people and their creative perspectives, intellectual contributions and ability to engage for positive social change. We should also emphasize the positive virtues of strong relationships of young people with their families, communities, educational institutions, youth organizations and work environments in order to help them make a smooth transition to adulthood.

Time constraints do not allow us to give a full and perfect summary of what transpired yesterday during the panel discussion. However, this summary attempts to capture of the salient features. I am certain that Member States and youth organizations will be able to consider this summary in the light of the outcome document of this High-level Meeting on Youth that was adopted earlier today (resolution 65/312).

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Clement Kofi Humado, Minister of Youth and Sports of Ghana, who co-chaired thematic panel 2.

Mr. Humado (Ghana): I thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me to read the Co-Chair's summary of the discussion that occurred in thematic panel 2. My presentation is made on behalf of myself and my co-Chair, His Excellency Mr. Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize that this presentation is not a comprehensive summary of all issues raised by the speakers, but rather a short summary of the salient points made. In this regard, we would like to thank all of those who participated. We are very grateful for their lively participation and valuable inputs.

The discussion of thematic panel 2 sought to examine challenges to youth development and to identify opportunities for poverty eradication, employment and sustainable development. The key issues noted are the following. Many young people, particularly those living in developing countries, continue to face poverty; lack of access to education, health care and other basic services; unemployment and underemployment. Youth development is critical. It must be addressed through effective cross-sectoral policies and programmes involving strategic and coordinated partnerships among all relevant stakeholders.

Youth poverty is a serious global problem. Young people living in poverty are more likely to face barriers to schooling and skills development, with negative long-term effects on livelihoods and abilities to take advantage of opportunities. Quality education that addresses young people's needs, provides them with life skills and effectively prepares them for the labour market will create young people who are critical thinkers and creative problem-solvers. We must make further efforts to adapt our educational systems to the realities of the current labour market.

Greater national and international support must be provided for vocational training and skills development programmes that are aligned with labour-market realities. Education should also promote the value of social and political engagement. In this regard, many speakers noted that strengthening youth-led organizations to promote young people's engagement with others and their ability to learn ways to represent themselves and others is a crucial element in developing democracy.

An emphasis should be put on educating girls and young women, which is considered by many to be the single most important effort that Governments can make to promote development. Girls and young women must not only be enabled to start school, but must also be assured the chance to participate in school, to feel safe in school and to stay in school.

Far too many young people remain unemployed or under-employed, or are forced to engage in dangerous, ill-paid or unproductive work that does little to improve their skills and their prospects. Access to decent work is essential to youth development. Meaningful employment opportunities for young people must be created by helping them to develop new skills, knowledge and abilities.

Promoting the full and productive employment of youth promotes national development, and poverty eradication, social integration and sustainable development are components of the first step to access to such employment. In this regard, many speakers mentioned that special attention must be given to the specific needs of young migrants, as well as to young women.

The current high rates of youth unemployment must be tackled through targeted and integrated national youth employment policies that focus on inclusive job growth and improving employability. Employment must be targeted through cross-sectoral macroeconomic policies that generate employment-led economic growth. Such policies should be devised with simultaneous attention to issues of finance, social welfare and environmental protection and should be developed, implemented and evaluated through tripartite partnerships including Government, the private sector and representatives of civil society organizations, including youth-led organizations.

Access to basic services, such as education, health and information, must remain a priority during conflicts. Efforts must be made to ensure that structures and institutions continue to guarantee youth development at all times, including during conflicts. Macroeconomic policies must embrace sustainability and all stakeholders must work to support sustainable development. Investing in green jobs for youth is key and can contribute to poverty eradication and job creation. Young people must be at the centre of development, and involving youth organizations in the broader transition to a green economy is essential.

While many Member States and intergovernmental bodies make commendable efforts to integrate youth in decision-making processes, more can be done, in particular by ensuring that young people are seen as agents of development and not simply as beneficiaries of programmes.

In conclusion, I would note that we need to be optimistic about the future of our young people. Opportunities for their development exist everywhere if we can capture the initiative and take the necessary actions. Youth participation means challenging long-standing traditions. This may involve a degree of risk-taking, but recent events have demonstrated that change is necessary.

The President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker for this meeting.

Today and yesterday we have had intense debates. I thank all of those who took part in the debates and particularly the young people who participated in our work. I also call on all Member States to make every possible effort to promote the outcome document (resolution 65/312) as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.

United Nations

A/65/PV.113

General Assembly

Sixty-fifth session

Official Records

113th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 27 July 2011, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Deiss . . . . (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 162 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the high-level meeting held on 24 September 2010: Revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations

The President (*spoke in French*): In opening this meeting, I would like to be able to commend the Conference on Disarmament. Unfortunately, I cannot do so owing to the paralysis that has characterized the Conference for more than 10 years. That is serious for disarmament, which is, let us not forget, a key element of promoting peace, and for the Conference and its role in global governance. If the Conference does not regain its momentum, it could well be discredited and become completely useless.

In that context, I wish to especially thank our Secretary-General for his efforts to revitalize the Conference, in particular by organizing the High-level Meeting that took place last September. I fully endorse such efforts. Moreover, I had the opportunity to impart my concern with regard to the stagnation of the Conference both during that High-level Meeting and when I addressed the Conference directly in Geneva in February.

The High-level Meeting gave rise to a certain number of welcome initiatives. In particular, the fact that the follow-up to the Meeting will be on future agendas of the First Committee and of the General Assembly provides Member States the opportunity to discuss the situation of the Conference. Furthermore, it must be recalled that that is in line with the United Nations Charter, which clearly states that the General Assembly

> "may consider the general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments".

The General Assembly is empowered to make recommendations to Member States on that issue, and I call on participants to do so today.

During the autumn 2010 session, the First Committee thus adopted a draft resolution by consensus and included the issue on the agenda of its next session. I therefore encourage the Committee to send a strong signal to the Conference on Disarmament this year with a view to overcoming its stagnation.

In order to revitalize the Conference, the Secretary-General also mandated the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to devote itself exclusively to the situation of the Conference on Disarmament during its two working sessions in 2011. I hope that the recommendations contained in the report drawn up by the Board (A/65/228) will hold the full attention of members of the Conference and of all States members of the General Assembly. I believe that the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent persons could bring a new perspective and revitalize the Conference. We will shortly have the opportunity, at an

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informal meeting, to hear more about the Board's work.

I believe it crucial to identify the real reason for the paralysis. Some blame the consensus rule. That is part of the basic rules of the Conference's work, and it is always desirable that the decisions of the Conference enjoy broad-based support. Still, the consensus rule should not become a reason for deadlock or an implicit right of veto. However, that explanation falls a little short. The Conference has always respected that principle. In the past, in much more complex, polarized situations, the Conference demonstrated its capacity to successfully conclude difficult negotiations.

What is lacking today is a true political will to move forward. A flexible approach, using all available disarmament tools and based on stronger negotiation and persuasion skills, is necessary to overcome resistance and build a climate of trust.

While informal approaches are, in my opinion, an avenue to explore, such approaches and their outcomes must nevertheless be in the context of the Conference. We must not deprive the Conference of its legitimacy by circumventing it, but help it to recover its former effectiveness. Our efforts must seek that goal, and that must motivate our discussions today.

In trying to overcome the current deadlock, it is important to maintain an integrated approach on disarmament and non-proliferation matters. That is one of the great qualities of the programme of work adopted in 2009. Although unfortunately never implemented, that programme is the outcome of a subtle balance among the various interests and concerns of Member States. In that regard, it should serve to inspire us if we want to move forward, and it could be used as a model to the Conference in the quest for a new programme of work. I am confident that States members of the Conference will ultimately shoulder their responsibilities, negotiate a new programme of work and, above all, implement it.

In recent years, the international environment has been particularly conducive to disarmament. Expectations are therefore high. It is our duty not to disappoint them. I therefore call on speakers today, beyond stating support for the Conference, to truly examine concrete channels in order to enable us to overcome the deadlock and to provide the means for significant progress on disarmament.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: We meet in the midst of a growing crisis of confidence. The United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery, in particular the Conference on Disarmament, has failed us for too long. As we look ahead, we face two critical questions. First, what are we to do when the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum is incapable of delivering on its mandate? Secondly, how can the world resume the process of building disarmament norms that apply universally?

Those questions led me to convene the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations last September. The concerns expressed at that Meeting, coupled with the many initiatives that were proposed, testify to the importance that Member States attach to the challenge. I am also grateful to the President of the General Assembly for his own efforts to address the issue. In the Chairman's summary of that meeting (A/65/496, annex), I proposed four actions.

First, I strongly suggested that the Conference on Disarmament readopt its 2009 programme of work, or a similar proposal submitted during the 2010 session. To encourage progress, I addressed the Conference on Disarmament last January for my third time as Secretary-General. So far, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to respond. I look forward to a more action-oriented move from the membership, pending the final status of the Conference on Disarmament's 2011 session.

Secondly, I proposed that the General Assembly include an item to follow-up on the High-level Meeting on the agenda of its sixty-fifth session. The Assembly approved that request. It has also added the item to the agenda of its forthcoming sixty-sixth session.

Thirdly, I asked my Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to review the issues raised at the High-level Meeting. The Board has completed its review. My report on the Board's work (A/65/228) is now before members, and I look forward to their feedback.

Fourthly, I stated that I would submit a report on the High-level Meeting and its follow-up to next year's first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015

Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Member States have identified many options for revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament and carrying forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. One option is the status quo approach, namely, to continue seeking consensus in the Conference on Disarmament without fundamentally changing its mandate or rules. Many States, however, are understandably reluctant to follow such a course, given the years that have passed without result. Indeed, I am among the many who have warned that the status quo will simply render the Conference on Disarmament irrelevant and obsolete. A second set of options consists of various proposals for fundamental reforms in the multilateral disarmament machinery. Some feel that those would be best addressed at a fourth special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. There is still no consensus among Member States on convening such a gathering. That leaves the third option — incremental change.

Yet even these proposals, modest as they are, have encountered resistance. Various States argue strongly for or against changing the Conference on Disarmament's rules of procedure. Proposals for ad hoc mechanisms have also found supporters and opponents. State policy priorities differ widely. States even disagree over where reforms should be implemented. Should it be in the Conference on Disarmament, in the General Assembly and its First Committee, outside the United Nations, in a conference on a specific disarmament issue, or in an ad hoc forum organized by like-minded countries?

As Secretary-General, I see no fundamental flaw in the United Nations disarmament machinery that may be blamed for this deadlock, and certainly none that cannot be overcome by changes in State policies. The problem lies not with the vehicle, but with the driver. What is needed most of all is a closer alignment between policy priorities and multilateral disarmament goals. If differences persist, we could consider the appointment of a high-level panel of eminent persons, as I have suggested. Alternatively, States could conduct the negotiations in an ad hoc committee of the General Assembly or at a United Nations conference.

There are no quick fixes. The road ahead will not be easy. Yet we must never abandon multilateralism or our respect for universal norms. We must remain true to the ideals of the United Nations. In addressing disarmament, as with other global public goods, our goal is not to advance the preferences of the few, but the common interests of all.

If the Conference on Disarmament remains deadlocked, the General Assembly has a responsibility to step in. As I have said before, the Conference on Disarmament should not be held perpetually hostage by one or two members. Concerns should be addressed through negotiations. The stakes are too high to continue falling short. The world expects progress. Let us defer no longer. Let us put an end to this long cycle of stagnation. For my part, I will do all I can to assist in achieving our shared goals.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now suspend the formal meeting to declare open the informal meeting of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the High-level Meeting held on 24 September 2010 to revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The meeting was suspended at 10.25 a.m. and resumed at 10.45 a.m.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are 50 speakers on the list. That calls for a certain discipline with respect to the length of statements. I propose limiting statements to eight minutes, but it is quite possible and representatives are free to talk for a shorter time than that and only to speak for five minutes. In preparing texts of that length, one can count on a page usually taking three minutes.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at this important meeting. The Non-Aligned Movement is composed of 120 countries, and if I take eight minutes for each of them, it will take up about one day to deliver my statement, but I am not going to do that.

This meeting, convened as a follow-up to the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations that was held upon the initiative of the Secretary-General on 24 September 2010, is very important. I would like to thank the Secretary-General and you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting.

As consistently reaffirmed by the Non-Aligned Movement summits and ministerial conferences, including the recent sixteenth NAM ministerial conference held in Bali, Indonesia, in May, NAM underscores the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It reiterates its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation. NAM reaffirms its principled position on nuclear disarmament, which remains its highest priority, and on the related issues of nuclear non-proliferation in all its aspects, and stresses the importance that efforts aiming at nuclear non-proliferation should be parallel to simultaneous efforts on nuclear disarmament. Progress in both is essential to strengthening international peace and security.

In that context, NAM stresses that nuclear disarmament, as the highest priority established by the first special session devoted to disarmament and as a legal obligation, should not be made conditional to confidence-building measures or other disarmament efforts. While emphasizing the vital role of a strong and genuine political will in multilateral negotiations on disarmament, NAM hopes that today's deliberations and the proposals made by the Secretary-General and the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters will contribute to enhancing political will in support of the United Nations disarmament machinery and the multilateral disarmament negotiations within the United Nations.

To realize a world free of nuclear weapons free from the colossal global expenditures and the energies of the nuclear-weapon States concentrated on the possession, development and modernization of nuclear weapons, using such expenditures instead to further global development and peace, it is critical that nuclear-weapon States fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations. There should be concrete progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

NAM reiterates its deep concern over the lack of progress towards nuclear disarmament, in particular on the part of the nuclear-weapon States, to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals in accordance with the relevant multilateral legal obligations. As a necessary step in the much-sought and long-delayed realization of general and complete disarmament, NAM underscores the need for the nuclear-weapon States to implement their nuclear disarmament obligations and their unequivocal undertaking in 2000, and further reiterated at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), so as to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear weapons. In that regard, NAM emphasizes the urgent need to commence negotiations on comprehensive and complete nuclear disarmament with a specific time frame and without delay.

NAM notes with concern the lack of multilateral agreement on a number of its key priorities, in particular beginning negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention, and calls for tangible progress in that regard. NAM States parties to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are convinced that it is vital that the action plan adopted by the 2010 NPT Review Conference on aspects of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East be implemented.

Welcoming the adoption by consensus of the detailed plan of action on the Middle East, particularly the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, and the conclusion and recommendations of the follow-on action of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, NAM States parties to the NPT strongly urge the Secretary-General and sponsors of the 1995 resolution, in close consultation and coordination with the States of the region, to immediately take the necessary measures to convene in 2012 the conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, to be attended by all States of the Middle East.

NAM remains steadfast in fully supporting the multilateral disarmament agenda and in strengthening the United Nations disarmament machinery. It is high time that all countries, working together, cooperate more and bring to bear the respective political capital to revitalize that crucial machinery. Promoting the work of the United Nations disarmament machinery hinges on creating a suitable political environment, taking into account the security interests of all States, rather than changing the rules of procedure.

While there is a need to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations disarmament machinery, it is important to recall the achievements arrived at by the international community through the United Nations disarmament machinery, including key legal instruments, resolutions, guidelines and other crucial documents that constitute the framework, and are a reference for the work of the United Nations in the areas of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It thus remains important to preserve the nature, role and purpose of each part of this important machinery.

NAM recognizes the need to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations disarmament machinery. In this context, NAM notes that the main difficulty facing the disarmament machinery lies in the lack of true political will by some States to achieve actual progress, including, in particular, on nuclear disarmament.

While it is important to recall the achievements arrived at by the international community within the Conference on Disarmament, NAM expresses its disappointment at the fact that the Conference has not been able to undertake substantive work on its agenda for many years. In this regard, NAM believes that it is counterproductive to ascribe the lack of concrete results in the Conference only to its rules of procedure, as such an approach could conceal the true obstacle faced by the Conference, which is lack of political will.

NAM reaffirms the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating body on disarmament and reiterates its call on the Conference to agree on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work by, inter alia, establishing an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament as soon as possible and as the highest priority. NAM emphasizes the necessity of starting negotiations without further delay on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame, including a nuclear weapons convention. NAM reaffirms the importance of the unanimous conclusion reached by the International Court of Justice that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

NAM noted the adoption by the Conference of the programme of work for the 2009 session (CD/1864) on 29 May 2009, which was not implemented. NAM calls on the Conference to agree by consensus on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work without further delay.

NAM encourages the Conference on Disarmament to consider appointing a special coordinator on the expansion of the membership of the Conference as early as possible, with a view to examining the possible expansion of its membership, in accordance with its rules of procedure.

NAM also reaffirms the importance and relevance of the Disarmament Commission as the sole specialized, deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery and reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, as reaffirmed in the statement on the total elimination of nuclear weapons adopted by the sixteenth Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Bali.

NAM will consider the recommendations contained in the report of the Advisory Board and present our views during discussions of this issue during the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Mr. Serrano (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this declaration.

I would like first of all to commend you, Mr. President, for having scheduled this debate at this very appropriate moment. I should like also to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts and the message conveyed to us today, as well as the Chair of the Advisory Group and the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament.

The European Union is indeed disappointed at the absence of progress since the high-level meeting last September. We are nonetheless hopeful that our deliberations today will prove an opportunity to heed the calls made at that meeting for forward-looking and concrete discussions of future options — both for revitalizing the work of the Conference on

Disarmament and for the review of practical ideas on how to pursue multilateral disarmament negotiations.

We are encouraged by the fact that the high-level meeting and the General Assembly follow-up resolution, resolution 65/93, have stimulated the reflection process in both Geneva and New York. Indeed, we have been encouraged by important positive developments in the areas of global disarmament and non-proliferation over the past two years, illustrated, for example, by Security Council resolution 1887 (2009), the New START Agreement, the Washington on Nuclear Security Summit, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the intensified international public debate in which you, Mr. Secretary-General, have been personally involved, through your five-point plan. The European Union warmly welcomes these developments, though we are, naturally, aware that renewed and constant effort will be needed to ensure that the international community builds on the new momentum.

Indeed, now is the time to reinforce and revitalize multilateral efforts, since we all recognize that today's global security problems require cooperative and multilateral solutions. We in the European Union are fully committed to maintaining and strengthening the momentum and committed to implementing agreed outcomes in full cooperation with other States, both because this is in keeping with our EU strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and because this is more than ever a key condition of international peace and security.

Notwithstanding the positive trends overall, the European Union remains deeply troubled by the apparent dysfunction of a crucial part of the disarmament machinery: the ongoing stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. The adoption in 2009 of the programme of work would have been an important breakthrough which would have allowed Conference members to start negotiations on a multilateral and verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. For the European Union, launching these negotiations remains important and urgent. The EU thus continues to urge the last remaining State so far unwilling to join the consensus to begin negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). Doing so would allow the Conference to resume its negotiating role and thereby regain credibility and continue to pursue its fundamental purpose.

All States members of the Conference on Disarmament should, we believe, appreciate the fact that starting FMCT negotiations is the beginning of a process of identifying and protecting specific national security concerns, rather than the outcome of such a process. The European Union considers the blockage of the whole Conference on Disarmament forum by a refusal even to start negotiations to be an unacceptable practice. It seriously undermines the principle of multilateral cooperation.

We also consider that there are confidence-building measures that can be taken immediately, without waiting for the beginning of formal negotiations. That is why we call on all States possessing nuclear weapons to declare and then uphold a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The EU thus reaffirms once more its commitment to engaging in substantive discussions on all the other core issues on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament.

We deeply regret that despite clear manifestations of strong political will on the part of the majority of Conference on Disarmament members and firm support for negotiations and clear calls at both the current session of the General Assembly and the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the Conference has not yet been able to build upon the momentum in global disarmament and non-proliferation. We acknowledge the security concerns of all States, but at the same time we firmly believe that the consensus rule must not be subject to abuse. The world cannot afford to stand still on the crucial issues of disarmament and non-proliferation or to allow procedural issues to stymie real political progress. A review of working methods is therefore part of the EU's proposals to improve the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me use this occasion to reiterate the EU's longstanding attachment to the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament. The European Union supports the call made by the informal group of observer States to the Conference, including some States members of the EU, to appoint, during the current session, a special coordinator on expansion of the membership of the Conference.

Consistent with the EU's engagement with civil society, we are also keen to explore ways to strengthen the voice of non-governmental organizations and to associate research institutions with the work of the Conference.

The First Committee is another important body where discussion of current topics and potential initiatives on non-proliferation and disarmament issues can fruitfully take place. States Members of the United Nations share responsibility for maintaining the relevance of this forum, and we believe that the First Committee should therefore improve its working methods so as to be capable of debating contemporary security challenges and developing concrete measures to address them.

I would also like to make mention of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. We believe that its procedures and operating principles should also be thoroughly reviewed and enhanced.

Greater involvement of civil society in the work of that body should also be welcome. The aim of the United Nations Disarmament Commission is to submit recommendations on issues of disarmament and arms control to the General Assembly and, through it, to the Conference on Disarmament. Indeed, it is with great regret that the EU notes that both the deliberative and the negotiating bodies set up under the auspices of the General Assembly have been falling short of their agreed goals for more than a decade.

The Conference on Disarmament, in accordance with the mandate it received, should be the place to forge multilateral treaties shared by nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States alike. However, given the continuing stalemate in the Conference, the international community needs to reflect on options and, if necessary, identify other ways to ensure progress. In sum, Mr. President, the European Union is ready to engage with you and with all States Members of the United Nations to identify ways and means to overcome the deadlock in the Conference.

Let me summarize the European Union's concrete proposals. First, we call on all States Members of the Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty without delay and to begin work on the other issues on the agenda. Secondly, we call on all States possessing nuclear weapons to declare and uphold an immediate moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Thirdly, we call on the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee and the United Nations Disarmament Commission to review their working methods and to duly reflect on this issue in their reports to the General Assembly. We naturally encourage the Assembly to remain seized of the issue. Fourthly, we call on the Conference on Disarmament to include the current observer States as full members. Lastly, we call on the Conference on Disarmament to explore ways to strengthen the contribution of non-governmental organizations in the Conference and to increase contacts with research institutions.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to making the United Nations and the disarmament machinery able to deliver tangible results. We also stand ready to work with all delegations on further steps to make other operational suggestions and to envisage other concrete and operational options. The effective functioning of multilateral disarmament institutions is vital to our security. The long-term deadlock of core disarmament forums such as the Conference on Disarmament poses a serious problem which it calls all States to overcome. Moreover, time is running out. The Conference on Disarmament needs to resume its work without delay. We reiterate our call for a substantive follow-up and for the disarmament machinery to do what it was created to do.

Mr. Araud (France): Allow me, Mr. President, on behalf of the People's Republic of China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, to thank you for convening this follow-up meeting to the High-level Meeting held on 24 September 2010. We welcome the personal commitment and leadership you have shown on disarmament and non-proliferation. We fully support your continuing efforts to revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We are deeply concerned by its long-running stalemate and lack of progress since last year's meeting. It is crucial to reaffirm the negotiating role of the Conference and to allow it to resume its substantive work without delay.

Ten months after the High-level Meeting, today's follow-up meeting is a timely opportunity to reflect on the situation of the disarmament machinery and to consider ways to make further progress on disarmament and international peace and security.

We welcome the numerous positive developments in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. In particular, the adoption of a concrete and balanced action plan on all three pillars of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) at the Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT in 2010 has shown the international community's firm commitment to reinforcing the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and addressing nuclear issues with a global and pragmatic approach.

Now, all State parties must work together to advance the implementation of the NPT action plan. In this context, the permanent five States members of the Security Council are strongly determined to assume their responsibilities and play their part. At the High-level Meeting in September last year, France undertook to organize the first permanent five follow-up meeting to the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Accordingly, on 30 June and 1 July, the permanent five met in Paris at the Director Generals and experts level with a view to considering progress on the commitment they made at the NPT Review Conference and to contributing to the preparation of the next NPT review cycle. They discussed a wide range of issues relating to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. That was the second time that the permanent five got together in that format with that agenda, the first being the London conference on confidence-building measures in 2009. The Paris conference was therefore a significant and vital opportunity to further build mutual trust and confidence on nuclear matters.

We would like to share with the Assembly the general outcomes of our discussions, which were reflected in the final joint press statement issued at the end of the conference. As nuclear-weapon States, we discussed how we intend to meet our disarmament obligations under the NPT, including engagement on the efforts called for in the 2010 NPT action plan, particularly the steps outlined in action 5, as well as reporting and other efforts.

We continued our previous discussions on the issues of transparency and mutual confidence, including nuclear doctrine and capabilities, and on verification. Such measures are important for establishing a firm foundation for further disarmament efforts.

We also shared views on measures to uphold the NPT's non-proliferation pillar to include how to respond to notifications of withdrawal from the NPT, while recognizing the provisions of article 10, and stressed the need to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, including by promoting the adoption of the Additional Protocol and the reinforcement of IAEA resources and capabilities for deterring and detecting non-compliance.

All States — NPT parties and non-parties — must contribute to fulfilling the overall objective of disarmament by creating the necessary security environment, resolving regional tensions, promoting collective security, ensuring that the international nuclear non-proliferation regime remains robust and reliable, and making progress in all areas of disarmament.

We are convinced that, as the sole standing multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, the Conference on Disarmament should maintain the primary role in substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament. We call on all Conference member States to agree without delay on the comprehensive and balanced programme of work, allowing the Conference to resume its substantive work.

We recognized that the one key element in the effective implementation of article 6 of the NPT and in the prevention of nuclear proliferation is the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). An FMCT would help cut off the most important building blocks needed for nuclear weapons. We reiterate our support for the immediate commencement of negotiation at the Conference on Disarmament of an FMCT, including verification provisions.

In order to sustain the potential of negotiation in the Conference, the permanent five will, prior to the next session of the General Assembly, renew their efforts with other relevant partners to promote such negotiation. Furthermore, the permanent five recall their commitment to promoting and ensuring the swift entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and its universalization.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like at this juncture to make some brief remarks in my national capacity. I fully endorse the European Union's statement. France, in all forums, including the Group of Eight (G-8) which we are chairing, supports any initiative seeking to improve international security in all areas: nuclear, biological, chemical, conventional, ballistic proliferation and space.

We must continue to jointly insist to those who may seek to take advantage of the stalemate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament that they are going against history. Today there is a consensus, minus one, for opening negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Needless to say, we hope that those negotiations will be conducted under the auspices of the Conference, since that is what it exists for.

With regard to the start of negotiations, we must demonstrate visibly our commitment to ending production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. Four nuclear-weapon States have already declared a moratorium on production of such material. We call earnestly on all nuclear Powers to declare a similar moratorium immediately. And we must go even further by making this halt to fissile material production irreversible. France has been a pioneer in this area by dismantling its production facilities irreversibly.

In the interests of saving time, I will stop here. The full version of my statement will be available on the website of France's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I have the privilege today of speaking on behalf of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), whose current members are Australia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

We are very grateful to you for convening this debate, Mr. President, as well as for your personal efforts towards the revitalization of the work of the Conference on Disarmament, including through your visit to Geneva this year. We also welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to this critical task.

This debate comes at an appropriate moment. At the conclusion of the second part of the Conference's annual session and sufficiently ahead of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, it is the right time to jointly assess the developments that have taken place since last September's High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and to exchange views on how to facilitate the Conference's resumption of substantive work. We should capitalize on a period of reflective momentum that has prevailed in New York and Geneva in recent months, and for which the meeting itself was a constructive stimulus.

The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative was established in September 2010 in order to build on the renewed momentum in disarmament and non-proliferation resulting from, in particular, the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). At their second foreign ministers' meeting in Berlin on 30 April, the NPDI member States reaffirmed their intention to work towards achieving nuclear disarmament and strengthening the international non-proliferation regime. Recognizing the danger to all humankind posed by the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons and the necessity of addressing increased proliferation risks, decreasing nuclear arsenals, strengthening nuclear security and improving nuclear safety, we continue to consider it compelling and urgent to reduce nuclear risks and achieve tangible progress on the path towards a world free of nuclear weapons. In Berlin, the NPDI foreign ministers reiterated their determination to support and help drive implementation of the consensus outcomes of last year's NPT Review Conference.

NPDI members have welcomed, sometimes led and certainly actively participated in various initiatives in the first and second part of the Conference on Disarmament's session this year aimed at facilitating work on the its current core issues. At the same time, however, we note with deep regret that the Conference has not been able to profit from broader positive trends in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. It has so far not implemented the three actions in the NPT Review Conference's action plan that pertain to its work: action 6 on establishing a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament; action 7 on substantive discussions on negative security assurances; and action 15 on fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) negotiations.

We also have to acknowledge that, instead of making progress, the Conference has actually taken a step backwards from its consensus adoption of a programme of work (CD/1864) in May 2009. We are convinced that the use of the consensus rule to prevent the start of FMCT negotiations, as well as substantive discussions on the other three core issues, has not only harmed the Conference's already diminished credibility, but also seriously undermined the entire multilateral disarmament process and, in the long run, therefore, the security interests of the entire international community.

The Conference on Disarmament has been unable to fulfil the task assigned to it — the negotiation of disarmament and non-proliferation instruments — for more than a decade. In light of this situation, we reiterate our firm conviction that the Conference must immediately start negotiations on an FMCT. However, while patience is a virtue, of course, continued passivity is not. Therefore, if an agreement on launching FMCT negotiations continues to elude us in the third part of the Conference's session, we are determined to ask the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session later this year to address the issue and consider ways to proceed with the aim of beginning FMCT negotiations.

We acknowledge that, of course, FMCT negotiations will be challenging from both a political and a technical point of view, no matter what venue is selected. In our view, these two aspects are closely intertwined. While we continue to consider that the earliest possible start of negotiations on an FMCT is the priority, we consider that establishing a group of scientific experts assigned to examine the technical aspects of an FMCT could facilitate and contribute to the start of negotiations. We are very willing to discuss this idea with interested parties.

The NPDI's concerns are by no means limited to one specific aspect of the Conference's work. In order to reshape it into an effectively functioning institution whose composition reflects the realities of this century, not the last, its current working methods need to be examined critically, its membership reviewed and its interaction with civil society increased.

While we consider the Conference's return to substantive work to be the most urgent task we have, our interest in revitalization extends beyond it. The Disarmament Commission constitutes another theoretically important but increasingly irrelevant pillar of the United Nations disarmament machinery. It would greatly profit from a review of its current work and from well-calibrated structural reform.

Furthermore, we call on the General Assembly's own First Committee to increase its practical relevance to disarmament and international security. Given the objective of today's debate, we particularly appeal to it to move the FMCT and other disarmament core issues forward. Overall, the Assembly should, in our view, continue to play an important role in marshalling the expectations of the international community vis-à-vis the multilateral disarmament machinery and identifying possible solutions to persistent problems. We look forward to this, as well as to possible future debates on the highly relevant and critical issue of making progress on multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Mr. Tatham (United Kingdom): I thank you for convening this important discussion, Mr. President. The United Kingdom welcomes your personal commitment and the leadership you have shown on disarmament and non-proliferation. We are very pleased to have this opportunity to take stock since last September's High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations.

The Government of the United Kingdom remains firmly committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and to making progress on multilateral disarmament. We take seriously our international disarmament obligations and have made concrete progress in the past year. In our strategic defence and security review in October 2010, we announced a number of disarmament measures around reducing the number of nuclear warheads and missiles on our submarines. We also gave a new, stronger assurance to non-nuclear weapon States.

There has been good progress on the international disarmament agenda in 2011. In February, the New START agreement entered into force, and a few weeks ago, the five nuclear-weapon States recognized under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) took part in a conference of the permanent five members of the Security Council in Paris. This was only the second time such a meeting has taken place, following the 2009 meeting hosted by the United Kingdom. We were delighted with the confidence-building discussions that took place and by the opportunity to look in detail at our disarmament obligations.

The outcomes from the conference, which my French colleague has already outlined on behalf of the permanent five, clearly demonstrate our collective determination to work together to implement the commitments made in the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I)). This includes practical steps taken by the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia as depositories of the NPT in our commitment towards the implementation of the 1995 NPT resolution on a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

We look forward to making progress on the disarmament and confidence-building initiatives agreed at the conference. As part of this follow-up work, the United Kingdom will host an expert-level meeting with our permanent five partners on lessons learned from our pioneering work with Norway on the verification of warhead dismantlement. Our work with Norway has demonstrated that nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States alike are able to make an active contribution to their NPT obligations through research into the verification of nuclear disarmament, while still complying with their non-proliferation obligations. Indeed, the cooperation of non-nuclear-weapon States in nuclear disarmament verification research is necessary in order to achieve effective and mutually trusted technical and procedural solutions to support verifiable multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Despite positive progress and momentum elsewhere, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has so far failed to produce any substantive work since the High-level Meeting last September. There is overwhelming support for the principle of a treaty that would end the future production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Starting negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) would constitute a significant achievement and necessary building block for our ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, as we all know, one country continues to block this step. It is for this reason, as opposed to any other, that we are here today and have made no tangible progress on FMCT since the High-level Meeting last September.

If we want to move forward, we must focus our collective efforts on persuading all members to agree again to set the Conference on Disarmament back to work and start negotiating an FMCT. The side events organized by our Australian and Japanese colleagues constituted a welcome and informative initiative towards this end.

If it is to strengthen the global disarmament and non-proliferation framework in a meaningful way, a future FMCT must prohibit the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons and other explosive devices by all States. For this reason, the United Kingdom wishes to re-emphasize its strong commitment to starting negotiations on an FMCT within the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference on Disarmament represents the best option we have for negotiations with all the relevant States as members. It is an institution that, through its rules of procedure, shows respect for everyone's security. And we still have a programme of work ready to go, agreed by all except one. Document CD/1864 provides for negotiations on an FMCT as well as substantive discussions on the other agenda items on which the Conference on Disarmament has also failed to make progress in the past two years.

We must continue to reassure all members that the Conference on Disarmament's well-established rules offer protection for all countries security interests, both during negotiations and in the eventual signature and ratification phase. It is to be expected that some countries will have concerns about what an FMCT might mean for them. There will be plenty of opportunities to discuss all of the issues and concerns at the negotiating table.

The public statement from the Paris conference of the permanent five reiterated the strong support of the five for the immediate start of FMCT negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. The permanent five made a commitment to renew efforts with relevant partners to promote such negotiations prior to the next session of the General Assembly. We intend to pursue further detailed discussions on the main treaty issues with other relevant partners, building on the side events that have already taken place. As these discussions progress, momentum towards negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament will continue to build. We appeal to all States to sustain this momentum, and on the last remaining State to join the consensus and end its block on allowing the Conference on Disarmament to conduct its work as soon as possible. This block has been damaging for multilateralism inside the United Nations and has encouraged some to consider bypassing traditional institutions in order to try to make quick progress on an FMCT.

The Conference on Disarmament urgently needs to show that it is still relevant and that it can prove its potential as the best means of finding sustainable solutions for the challenges of global arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation in the twenty-first century.

Ms. Gottemoeller (United States of America): I thank you, sir, for the opportunity to speak today. The United States welcomed the initiative of the Secretary-General to convene last September's High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations, in the hopes that it would spur progress on negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) in the Conference on Disarmament. We co-sponsored resolution 65/93 on follow-up to the High-level Meeting, and we also welcome the opportunity today to take stock of where we are 10 months later. The United States shares your commitment to progress, Mr. President, and your interest in seeing this process carried forward.

Two years ago in his speech in Prague, President Obama affirmed the commitment of the United States "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons" and laid out a plan of action for near-term practical steps to move in that direction. Since then, significant progress has been registered. I will not detail all of it here, but I would like to highlight a few successes because they stand in stark contrast to the continuing failure to begin negotiations on a priority objective — a ban on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

A key arms control achievement of the past year was the entry into force of the New START agreement with the Russian Federation this past February. Implementation of the Treaty is well under way. As of last weekend, we and the Russian Federation had exchanged 1,000 notifications in implementation of the Treaty regime. Furthermore, we have conducted 13 inspections, six by the Russian Federation and seven by the United States. We are keeping pace in our implementation efforts.

In May, President Obama also submitted to the Senate for its advice and consent the protocols of the African and South Pacific nuclear-weapon-free zones Treaties. And we are in discussion with parties to the South-East Asia and Central Asia nuclear-weapon-free zones Treaties in an effort to reach agreement that would allow the United States to sign the Protocols to those treaties, as well.

The United States remains committed to securing ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and we are engaging the United States Senate and the American public on the merits of that Treaty.

As already reported by the representative of France, the nuclear-weapon States recognized under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — the permanent five — met in Paris on 30 June and 1 July to engage on issues bearing on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and in particular steps outlined in the action plan adopted at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the NPT (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I)). This was a continuation of discussions begun in London in 2009 and will continue with a third conference in the context of the Preparatory Committee for the 2012 NPT Review Conference. These meetings are helping to build a process for permanent-five dialogue on transparency, nuclear doctrine and verification, recognizing that such a dialogue is needed if we are to establish a firm foundation for further disarmament efforts.

The United States has spared no effort to initiate negotiations in the Geneva Conference on Disarmament on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. The completion of such a treaty continues to be the top multilateral priority for the United States and the vast majority of others, and would be a major international achievement in non-proliferation and disarmament. At a time when significant progress has been registered in other areas of arms control and disarmament, it is all the more disappointing that a single State has prevented the Conference on Disarmament from again taking its place on the disarmament stage and undertaking negotiations to reach that long-overdue objective.

The preference of the United States is to negotiate the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) within the Conference on Disarmament. We welcomed the initiative of Australia and Japan to organize serious technical FMCT discussions at the margins of the Conference on Disarmament this year. The activity proved to be productive, substantive and collegial, but this does not obscure the central fact that the Conference on Disarmament remains blocked and that we are no closer to FMCT negotiations today than we were two years ago, when a compromise programme of work was adopted by consensus by all 65 Conference on Disarmament members.

It is because of this continuing stalemate that we have launched consultations to move the issue forward. We are encouraged, therefore, that the permanent five agreed in Paris to take steps prior to the next General Assembly session to renew efforts with other relevant partners to promote such FMCT negotiations, and we are planning these activities now.

Turning to the issue of the United Nations disarmament machinery and how it functions — or does not function — I note that this is often a subject of discussion. For example, improvements motivated the 1978 decision to create the Committee on Disarmament — renamed Conference soon after — by the then-member States of the Conference on Disarmament's predecessor body. They judged that certain changes, such as a rotating presidency and membership expansion, would render the body more representative and more productive. The decisions of those States were recalled in the Final Document of the first special session devoted to disarmament (resolution S-10/2).

More recently, serious thought and a number of interesting ideas have emerged regarding reform of the Conference on Disarmament and other disarmament machinery. But we should consider such proposals with our eyes wide open, realistic about what the root cause of the current deadlock is. While the machinery could certainly benefit from a tune-up, it is not the underlying cause of the breakdown in the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference has produced good results in years past: the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Put simply, when countries share an objective, they can move it forward in the Conference on Disarmament, and this is an experience we wish to see repeated, starting with the fissile material cut-off treaty.

The Secretary-General has offered recommendations on how to proceed with a review of multilateral disarmament affairs, and he has provided us with a thoughtful report on the work of his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (A/65/228). The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research has also provided stimulating food for thought. We have a wealth of ideas.

A panel of eminent persons, the Conference on Disarmament itself, or some others might usefully continue their exploration to include recommendations on the following: how to revamp or reconsider the role of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, which, after yeoman's efforts, has been unable to reach consensus for a number of years on any agenda item; and how to update the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. Its decalogue and agenda could be updated to reflect the current international security environment. Members should also review some of its other procedures and recommend changes that would encourage greater continuity and focus.

Also included would be recommendations on how to provide for continuity on an agreed Conference on Disarmament work programme from year to year, such as automatic rollover of an agreed programme of work; how to protect national security interests while preventing abuse of the consensus rule; and whether expansion of the Conference on Disarmament would improve its efficiency, and how to reflect universal disarmament goals in deliberative and negotiating bodies while maintaining their efficacy and ensuring that States' security concerns are respected and protected. This is the fundamental issue. In this regard, we view that, theoretically, working with 193 members would inevitably pose complexities. I might note that the Conference on Disarmament in its current composition, expanded since 1996 to 65 member States, has yet to demonstrate its ability to function as a negotiating body.

In exploring new ways to proceed, we think that balance is needed. The status quo is unacceptable, but we should also guard against being overly ambitious, lest we lose our way. As we seek our way forward, we must keep our eye on the prize and, for most of the international community, that prize is a fissile material cut-off treaty as the next immediate multilateral nuclear disarmament step. Calls for yet another special session on disarmament are a distraction at best. A special session on disarmament is not the only or the most practical vehicle for reform in the light of its record of failure. Unless we have agreed objectives for such a session, we should better direct our efforts where progress can be made.

Mr. Wang Min (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank you and the Secretary-General for your statements.

The High-level Meeting held in September 2010 held useful discussions on the work of the Conference on Disarmament and multilateral disarmament negotiations. China hopes that today's meeting will also play an active role in facilitating multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Arms control and disarmament are closely related to security and have always been the barometer of changes in the international security situation. It is now the general hope of the international community that the multilateral disarmament process, and the work of the Conference on Disarmament in particular, will move forward so as to further promote the security of all States.

Since the beginning of this year, the parties have displayed positive intentions and adopted a constructive approach to the advancement of the work of the Conference on Disarmament. However, differences among the parties remain to be bridged and renewed efforts are required of Conference members in order to break the impasse in its work.

Given the current circumstances, China would like to make the following proposals on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward the multilateral disarmament process.

First, the authority of the Conference on Disarmament should be respected and maintained. As the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, the Conference is irreplaceable by any other international mechanism. Since the end of the Cold War, the Conference has negotiated and concluded the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. These two instruments have contributed greatly to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the advancement of the international arms control and disarmament process, and their effects have been vindicated by history. If the fissile material cut-off treaty is to fulfil its dual objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and in order to ensure its authority, effectiveness and universality, it must be negotiated within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament.

Secondly, the legitimate security concerns of States should receive due attention and equal treatment. The Conference on Disarmament cannot work in a vacuum, and international and regional security situations are bound to have a direct and important bearing on its work. The legitimate security concerns of member States should be fully respected and appropriately addressed, both at the time of launching negotiations and during the negotiating process. It is for this very purpose that we engage in serious negotiations on multilateral arms control treaties, and it is also the necessary precondition for universal support for and compliance with such treaties.

Thirdly, we should maintain confidence in the Conference on Disarmament and further engage in creative thinking. Progress in the work of the Conference on Disarmament depends on the common efforts of — and especially synergy among — all member States in the framework of the Conference. Any idea or practice of resorting to another framework is obviously not conducive to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and will not produce a satisfactory fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). In the face of deadlock and difficulties, it is all the more necessary for Conference members to use political wisdom and fully mobilize diplomatic creativity to maintain the momentum on launching FMCT negotiations, and spare no effort in seeking workable ways to push the Conference to carry out substantive work on FMCT-related issues.

Fourthly, efforts should be made to advance the work of the Conference on Disarmament in a comprehensive manner. While negotiations on the FMCT should start at an early date, the Conference should also engage in substantive work on other important items, such as nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. This is the wish of the great majority of Conference members. I am convinced that work on these three items will have a positive effect on promoting FMCT negotiations.

China has always supported the work of the Conference on Disarmament and is in favour of starting FMCT negotiations as soon as possible. During China's tenure as President of the Conference on Disarmament this year, it has cooperated fully with other Presidents, conducted broad-based consultations with member States and made unremitting efforts to narrow differences and break the impasse. We hope that all sides will respect each other's legitimate security concerns and continue dialogue and consultations in a serious, equal, open and transparent manner with a view to reaching agreement on the programme of work of the Conference as soon as possible so that substantive work on various items can begin.

Taking forward the international arms control and disarmament process is in the interests of all parties and is the historic responsibility of all States. We believe in the political will and collective wisdom of the States members of the Conference on Disarmament and remain confident that the Conference will launch FMCT negotiations and start substantive work in other areas. Meanwhile, we make an urgent call on all parties to make new efforts and attempts to that end. China is willing to work with others and redouble its efforts to promote the healthy development of the cause of multilateral arms control and disarmament and to maintain world peace and security.

Mr. Schaper (Netherlands): I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of the following 41 States: Australia, Austria, Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Uruguay.

These States, from many regions across the globe, share the commitment to strengthen the multilateral disarmament system — and this will be the theme of my remarks today — so that this system can fulfil its purpose. We thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting, which provides an opportunity to assess the progress made since the adoption of resolution 65/93 on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations.

The 41 States I just mentioned consider it regrettable that, for more than a decade, the multilateral disarmament machinery, and the Conference on Disarmament in particular, have not met the expectations of the international community, as expressed in the Final Document of the first special session devoted to disarmament (resolution S/10-2) and the decisions and recommendations contained in numerous General Assembly resolutions and in outcome documents of the Review Conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Conference on Disarmament is simply failing to fulfil its mandate. It is failing to address the pressing security challenges facing the international community through effective multilateral arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation instruments.

For several years now, this lack of progress on new multilateral disarmament instruments has directly affected our common security in the twenty-first century and weakened the multilateral disarmament system. While progress has been made in other multilateral disarmament forums, the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to unlock its potential or to agree on the issue of wider participation by interested States and on enhanced engagement with members of civil society.

Our countries find this sorry picture of stagnation, stalemate and lack of results in the Conference on Disarmament unacceptable. We see an urgent need to revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament and to take forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. In this regard, we are highly appreciative of the Secretary-General's initiatives in support of such efforts.

The High-level Meeting of 24 September 2010 highlighted the views of States on the causes of the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. But above all, the High-level Meeting made it more evident that the international community wants to move beyond mere deliberations to action, and without further delay.

As members may be aware, during the course of 2011 Conference on Disarmament members in Geneva have increasingly voiced and documented their concerns about the deadlock, including during an interaction with you, Sir, on the occasion of your visit to Geneva in March. They have also expressed their concerns to the Secretary-General and the members of his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

But despite the considerable efforts of consecutive Conference on Disarmament Presidents for more than a decade, despite various suggestions and initiatives of Conference members, and despite the adoption of decisions that would have seen the Conference fulfil its mandate, the Conference is still failing to undertake substantive work.

Here in New York, the United Nations Disarmament Commission regrettably once again failed to produce any concrete recommendations. We consider this to be an additional indicator of the continued challenges facing the wider multilateral disarmament machinery.

If the multilateral disarmament machinery, especially the Conference on Disarmament, is not able to overcome this crisis, the international community, and the General Assembly in particular, will need to respond and give serious consideration to ways and means to overcome it. We cannot afford to start another Conference session in January 2012 accepting that the continued impasse is a given and that we cannot do anything about it.

Already, States are discussing various options. Some focus on giving the General Assembly a more central and active role in advancing multilateral disarmament negotiations. Some focus on implementing agreements previously reached in the Conference on Disarmament and other relevant multilateral forums. Some seek to intensify preparations for negotiations. Some focus on efforts to motivate a formal revitalization process within the Conference on Disarmament, and some seek to include a broader reform process of the disarmament machinery.

Although these different initiatives point to different focuses, they are all being explored -- and need to be explored — in order to improve global security, including through finding the most effective way to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. We hope that this debate can provide us with a suitable platform to keep addressing, in a transparent and inclusive manner, all possible future options for taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations effectively and in an outcome-oriented spirit. We must assume our responsibility, both in Geneva and here, to address these concerns effectively without further delay.

We welcome the attention of the Secretary-General and his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to the problems facing the disarmament machinery. At the same time, we recognize that the responsibility for current difficulties rests with States, as does the responsibility to find solutions. We stand ready to contribute actively and constructively to this forward-looking endeavour. All the States of the world have a vital interest, a right and a duty to participate in and contribute to the success of multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Mr. Kim Sook (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in expressing my sincere appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this meeting. As one of the member countries that co-signed the letter requesting this gathering, the Republic of Korea associates itself with the remarks made just now by the representative of the Netherlands. At this juncture, however, I would like to speak in my national capacity.

In recent years, we have taken many positive steps towards the long-awaited breakthrough in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Just last year alone, we witnessed the signing of the New START agreement, the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington, D.C., and the adoption of the decade-spanning Final Document by consensus at the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I)). In particular, the adoption of the Final Document at the 2010 NPT Review Conference amounts to a formal recognition by the international community that disarmament and non-proliferation are once again becoming central to the global agenda.

After these series of positive movements in other disarmament areas, our expectation for the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament is now greater than at any other time in recent years. Reflecting the aspirations of the international community, a High-level Meeting was convened by the Secretary-General in September 2010 as a response of the international community to the Conference on Disarmament. We have also observed various efforts made by many delegations this year. Nevertheless, the Conference continues to make little progress and the patience of the international community is gradually running out. Moreover, the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) has also failed to produce any final documents or recommendations since 1999. The multilateral disarmament machinery is, in fact, in severe disarray.

We believe that getting the Conference on Disarmament back on track lies at the heart of any solution. Further paralysis of the Conference may not only jeopardize its status and legitimacy as the premier forum for disarmament, but also damage the very foundations of the multilateral disarmament machinery, including the UNDC. I firmly believe that the Conference on Disarmament should act quickly if it wishes to continue to play a central role.

To encourage the Conference on Disarmament to move forward, it is necessary above all for each country to demonstrate more political flexibility with respect to its security considerations and modus operandi. Only when countries show flexibility and a spirit of cooperation will the Conference be able to evolve significantly and keep up with the rapidly changing disarmament climate. What the Conference process needs now is not an endless and empty debate, but concrete action.

As the Republic of Korea proposed at the September 2010 High-level Meeting, and as the Secretary-General suggested again this morning, I would like to call for the establishment of a group of eminent persons, under the auspices of the Secretary-General, to find solutions to the current difficulties in the Conference on Disarmament.

In this regard, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (A/65/228), in which he supports the establishment of such a group. The Secretary-General's Advisory Board noted that a group of eminent persons could help behind-the-scenes negotiations and draw significant global attention to the issue. We have recently witnessed similar kinds of groups in the fields of Millennium Development Goals and climate change financing. These cases could be good examples.

As we know, the Conference on Disarmament is a child of the General Assembly, and it is natural for the Assembly to discuss the predicament of its child. In this regard, I believe that not only internal efforts of the Conference on Disarmament but also external political stimulus may be of great help in breaking the deadlock in the Conference. I hope that the First Committee of the General Assembly will continue this year to discuss ways to revitalize the multilateral disarmament machinery.

The Republic of Korea is of the opinion that the international community shares the common view that, among all the issues in the Conference on Disarmament, a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for weapons is most in need of negotiation. The negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) is indispensable not only for nuclear non-proliferation, but also for nuclear disarmament. An FMCT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are of vital importance, symbolically and substantively, to the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. We are confident that once we start the negotiations on an FMCT, the momentum will lead to further discussions on other major issues, such as nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and negative security assurances, in a comprehensive and balanced way.

Once again, the Republic of Korea calls upon all Conference on Disarmament members to cooperate in commencing substantive work on an FMCT at the earliest possible time, to the benefit not only of nuclear non-proliferation, but also and more largely of nuclear disarmament. The Republic of Korea, for its part, will do its utmost to set the Conference on Disarmament process in motion.

Mr. Zhukov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation wholeheartedly supports the revitalization of the multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control machinery. We support the preservation and strengthening of the existing disarmament triad: the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the First Committee and the Conference on Disarmament. These forums have proven their necessity and their efficiency, and they have made a significant contribution to preserving international peace and security.

In our view, it is not now a matter of radically reorganizing them, but rather of marshalling the political will to kick-start these mechanisms to create new universal disarmament and non-proliferation agreements. We believe that the current situation of the multilateral disarmament process, specifically within the Conference on Disarmament, is the result not of any systemic breakdown in the multilateral disarmament machinery, but rather a reflection of the different priorities of States on disarmament and non-proliferation matters and in their vision of their legitimate national interests. The roots of the Conference's problems are extraneous to it.

Obviously, the Conference on Disarmament deals with very sensitive matters, namely, those of State security. Here as nowhere else, we must be willing to strike a reasonable compromise based on a balance of interests. In addition, we should not oversimplify the reasons behind the situation in the Conference on Disarmament or boil them down to procedural disagreements or clashes of ambitions and claims.

Significantly, notwithstanding the radical recent calls for the Conference on Disarmament to be closed down, for changes to its basic working principles or for a launch of new formats, an absolute majority of forum participants broadly recognized the importance of retaining the Conference on Disarmament as the key multilateral negotiation mechanism. The shock therapy proposed by some countries is a radical step that could not only paralyse the Conference on Disarmament definitively, but also seriously undermine the entire disarmament triad and ultimately destroy the existing disarmament machinery.

We cannot agree to such an approach. There is no silver bullet. Our aim must be to engage in a patient and respectful quest for mutually acceptable ways of breaking the deadlock, rather than taking rash and hasty steps and decisions. This pertains not only to procedural but also to substantive matters, not to mention punitive measures, such as the denial of financing.

In that regard, we support the balanced approach taken by the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Tokayev, to the effect that stagnation on the disarmament track, including at the Conference, is due mainly not to shortcomings in the mechanism but to the world geopolitical situation, strategic clashes between States and the lack of political will.

We oppose any review of the Conference on Disarmament's main working principle of consensus. At the same time, we are prepared to be flexible and seek fresh approaches that could break the deadlock. In that context, one interesting idea would be to broaden the membership of the Conference, to promote the greater involvement of non-governmental bodies, and to enhance public communications on disarmament matters.

Universal disarmament agreements can be elaborated under the auspices of the United Nations and on the basis of consensus. It is only in such circumstances that agreements become functional and adaptable to new realities and challenges. The diversion of negotiations onto parallel tracks among likeminded States is unlikely to lead to any universal or viable treaty. We are convinced that the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament would be in the interests of all Member States. We see no alternative to patient and respectful dialogue aimed at allaying the security concerns of particular Conference members, or to the achievement of agreement on the basis of the Conference agenda.

Document CD/1864 is a realistic basis for compromise. By supporting it, the Russian Federation demonstrated its willingness to take the positions of its partners into account and to agree to compromise. We expect the same of our partners. The Russian Federation's priority within the Conference on Disarmament is to develop a treaty on the prohibition of all types of weapons in outer space. The draft treaty submitted by us and China takes the interests of all States into account, without exception.

Another important challenge is the drafting of a universal, equitable and verifiable fissile material cut-off treaty. Its adoption would be one further step towards strengthening the disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Mr. Bavaud (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to thank and congratulate you, Sir, for convening this follow-up meeting to the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations, of 24 September 2010. Your initiative and engagement will undoubtedly help us to move forward on this issue.

Switzerland fully subscribes to the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of 40 countries. Allow me to add a few elements from the Swiss perspective.

Switzerland fully supports the Secretary-General's initiatives to take forward multilateral disarmament negotiations and to revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament. This process has already had significant effects. Since September 2010, we have seen important discussions in the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Disarmament Commission. Over the past 10 months, it has become clear that a growing number of States find the lack of progress on various issues related to disarmament unacceptable. In the course of these deliberations, it has also become evident that more and more States see the urgent need to revitalize the disarmament machinery and to start substantive work, most notably in the form of negotiations on one or several of the four core issues on the Conference's agenda.

Switzerland is convinced that the ongoing lack of agreement on new multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation instruments has undermined the multilateral disarmament system — a trend that will be in the interest of no State in the long run. To address this situation, we need to pursue complementing efforts undertaken within the Conference on Disarmament by marshalling political will and stepping up pressure outside that body. We also need to understand that the current deadlock cannot be attributed solely to external political factors, but is also linked to institutional issues. The existing mechanisms are manifestly unable to catalyze the necessary political will and to capitalize on it where it is developing.

To move forward, we also need to have institutions and mechanisms that reflect and capable of addressing current realities. We are living in a global, interdependent world that faces a multitude of shared disarmament and non-proliferation challenges. It is important to move from one-dimensional approaches to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation to more holistic approaches. It is critical to recognize that disarmament and non-proliferation activities affect numerous areas of concern to the international community other than peace and security; they have an impact on human security, human rights, development, the environment and health, to name just a few. Only if we include these aspects into our considerations will we be able to confront the challenges we are facing.

Our institutions should no longer be based on or continuously favour a clearly outdated conception of an all-prevailing national security paradigm. If they do not change, the Conference on Disarmament may run the risk of privileging the interests of some at the expense of the interests of the overwhelming majority of States and peoples of the world. We are convinced of the need to work inclusively and to build on the views of all stakeholders, such as other interested States, expert communities or civil society representatives.

We need institutions that are designed to produce results and not to maintain the status quo. They must be both responsive and preventive, and thus able to produce the instruments needed to address current as well as future challenges. Switzerland therefore recalls that the international community needs mechanisms, platforms and environments that encourage meaningful, timely, inclusive and effective deliberations and negotiations on all issues relating to disarmament in a larger sense. This must be our long-term goal.

While the High-level Meeting of 24 September 2010 was intended to promote the debate on how to overcome the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, the situation has not improved since then. In many ways, the deadlock is today more severe. Switzerland is of the view that we now need to complement the current dialogue with real action on various levels and on several fronts at the same time and in a sustainable manner.

In the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, for the remainder of the year and for the 2012 session, it is important to initiate substantive work within the existing framework and to start negotiations. The Conference must also continue the ongoing reflection on its strengths and weaknesses in a more systematic and outcome-oriented way with a view to making the necessary changes to make the Conference more functional. The Conference has no option but to demonstrate that it can produce results.

At the sixty-sixth session of the First Committee, Member States may want to consider launching issue-specific processes, for instance setting open-ended working groups on nuclear disarmament issues, including fissile material or the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Such processes should be anchored in Geneva, making use of the unparalleled expertise available in and around the Conference on Disarmament. If they are to be sustainable and provide an incentive to the Conference to resume its work, such processes should be complementary with possible future breakthroughs in that forum and be designed in a way that allows relevant results to be transmitted to the Conference at an appropriate stage.

At the broader level of the General Assembly, Member States should take forward the revitalization process by introducing fresh thinking, new ideas and pragmatic approaches. Such groundwork is essential to paving the way for the broader support needed to launch a deeper reform process. In this regard, the implementation of the recommendation contained in the recent report of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters on the setting-up of a high-level panel charged with the task of rapidly formulating proposals on such a reform could represent a constructive way forward.

To conclude, I would like to stress that as we try to move forward in our efforts to revitalize the multilateral disarmament machinery, Switzerland remains convinced of the need for a permanently available pool of disarmament delegations — supported by experts from Governments, international organizations and civil society — to review implementation issues of existing agreements and to negotiate new instruments. We also continue to believe in the need for a permanent forum, similar to the Conference on Disarmament, that addresses challenges in our field and contributes to global security in the twenty-first century.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba reaffirms the importance of promoting multilateralism as the core principle of disarmament negotiations. Multilaterally agreed solutions, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, provide the only sustainable method of addressing disarmament and international security issues.

Within the disarmament machinery, the Conference on Disarmament plays a crucial role in the multilateral negotiation of universally accepted disarmament treaties. If the Conference did not exist, we would have to create it without delay. We regret that the Conference has been unable to carry out substantive work for over a decade. Some insist that the causes lie in its working methods and rules of procedure. Cuba does not share that interpretation. The best vindication of our assessment is that what has happened to the Conference on Disarmament is far from an isolated situation within the disarmament machinery.

For instance, it is no coincidence that the United Nations Disarmament Commission concluded its work again this year, for the twelfth consecutive time, without agreeing on substantive recommendations. In addition, every year the First Committee adopts dozens of resolutions — particularly on disarmament — that are simply not implemented. The fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament has still not been convened, in spite of the fact that the Non-Aligned Movement has insisted on this matter for many years.

Cuba supports the optimization of the United Nations disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament. However, we are convinced that the paralysis currently affecting most of the disarmament machinery is caused first and foremost by the lack of political will on the part of some States to achieve genuine results, particularly on disarmament.

We are concerned about the insinuations by some delegations that the time has come to set aside the Conference on Disarmament and turn to alternative negotiation processes. Cuba opposes the replacement of the Conference with selective, improvised ad hoc arrangements outside the framework of the United Nations and managed by certain countries. If such criteria are imposed, we would be taking a dangerous step backwards. The solution is not to start disregarding the Conference on Disarmament or to minimize its importance. On the contrary, today more than ever, its preservation and strengthening are the responsibility of us all.

The Conference must adopt as soon as possible a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that takes real disarmament priorities into consideration. Cuba is ready to negotiate, in parallel with the Conference on Disarmament, a treaty that eliminates and prohibits nuclear weapons; a treaty that bans the arms race in outer space; a treaty that provides effective security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States, like Cuba; and a treaty that bans the production of fissile material for the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We believe that the Conference on Disarmament is capable of supporting these negotiations simultaneously.

The negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty for the manufacture of nuclear weapons would be a positive action, but still insufficient in and of itself if the subsequent steps to achieve nuclear disarmament are not defined.

Nuclear disarmament is and must remain the highest priority in disarmament. On this basis, consensus must be achieved in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference must urgently commence negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time frame, including a nuclear weapons convention. The mere existence of nuclear weapons and of doctrines prescribing their possession and use poses a serious threat to international peace and security. It is simply unacceptable that there are almost 23,000 nuclear weapons in the world today, 7,560 of which are ready for immediate use.

On 22 August, Cuba will assume the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and the responsibility to draft and negotiate the report of that body for presentation to the First Committee. It is our firm purpose to make every possible effort to promote substantive negotiations with that body, in accordance with its mandate to negotiate international treaties on disarmament and arms control. That will require the contribution of each and every member of the Conference. The opportunity to prove our commitment to disarmament and peace through concrete actions is in our hands.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Let me first of all extend my appreciation to you, Sir, for having organized this important meeting today. Allow me also to express my hope that this meeting will provide a good opportunity to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament and return it to the right track.

My delegation fully supports the statement made by Mr. Maged A. Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Nuclear disarmament remains a top priority in securing world peace and security. The first appearance of nuclear weapons in 1945 marked the beginning of the history of the most destructive weapons ever used against humankind. The dropping of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, was its central event, more than amply proving to the world the destructive consequences of even a single nuclear weapon for global peace and security. Moreover, the appearance of the first nuclear-weapon State in 1945 was a fundamental root cause of nuclear proliferation to the rest of the world, resulting in a chain reaction. If the successes of a sacred human science had not been used to an ill-famed and dangerous end that could result in the destruction of all humankind, the proliferation of nuclear weapons might not be an issue today. As we can see, nuclear weapons are a matter directly relating to the survival of humankind and to the peace and security of the world.

The nuclear-weapon States have an unavoidable obligation to implement their commitments under the existing international norms. In 1996, the International Court of Justice made it very clear to the world that the use of nuclear weapons is a violation of international law. It brought to our attention the fact that all other existing weapons without exception are under the full control of treaties or conventions, but that nuclear weapons remain outside multilateral international laws. The same is true of negative security assurances towards non-nuclear-weapon States.

Recent developments cast dark shadows over the prospects for nuclear disarmament, focusing the attention of the international community. Nuclear-weapons modernization programmes are openly propelled by nuclear doctrines that recall the Cold War. I bring to members' attention the fact that projects are under way to develop small nuclear weapons to be used like conventional weapons.

In addition to this, the development of a missile defence system is making steady headway, in defiance of international concerns. The system being promoted under the pretext of responding to so-called ballistic missile developments by what some call "rogue States" is far from logical, given its exorbitant funding and geographical network covering the entire world. The nature and scope of the missile defence system speak eloquently of its defender's real target, which is none other than gaining absolute nuclear superiority and global hegemony over its nuclear rivals.

In the current changing world, one can easily predict that this dangerous move will eventually spark a new nuclear arms race. This shows that the world's largest nuclear-weapon State has lost its legal and moral justification to talk of proliferation issues before the international community, on whatever grounds. If the largest nuclear-weapon State truly wants non-proliferation, it should set a good example by negotiating a treaty abolishing nuclear weapons.

The total and complete elimination of nuclear weapons remains the consistent policy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A treaty abolishing nuclear weapons should be concluded in a time-bound, verifiable, irreversible and legally binding manner. This policy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a good reflection of the unique and special security environment to which the country has been exposed for decades under continuing external nuclear threat and blackmail. Since the first nuclear weapon was introduced into South Korea in 1957 by the United States, the number of nuclear weapons there has exceeded 1,000.

As a state member and the current President of the Conference on Disarmament, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will do everything possible to move the Conference forward. Nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances, and the banning of outer space weapons and fissile materials are all pending issues in the Conference. It is regrettable that nuclear disarmament and negative security assurances have not yet been settled, although they have a history of decades-long discussion that began with the establishment of the United Nations.

The cause of the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament, which has persisted for more than a decade, is a lack of political will. If the Conference is to move forward, the security interests of all member countries should be fully considered. In this regard, the programme of work adopted by the Conference in 2009 is something of value to be reconsidered, since it reflects on an equal basis all the pending issues on the agenda.

Mr. Ragaglini (Italy): Allow me at the outset to reaffirm my delegation's gratitude to you, Sir, for having arranged this debate on the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament, in follow-up to the High-Level Meeting convened in September 2010 by the Secretary-General.

We fully subscribe to the statement delivered earlier by the Permanent Observer of the European Union. We also share the views presented by the delegation of the Netherlands on behalf of a number of like-minded States, including my own. I would like, however, to make a few comments in my national capacity, as a contribution to the debate and to identify a possible concrete follow-up to this initiative and to the general exercise launched last year.

The Conference on Disarmament has been stalled for more than a decade. It has not been able to perform its core task, which is negotiating global international instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. But I would argue that the whole international disarmament machinery is currently experiencing serious difficulties. The United Nations Disarmament Commission, while remaining a useful forum for in-depth discussion, has not been able to agree on substantial recommendations or decisions for many years.

In general, although we have seen significant successes in recent years, they have been achieved bilaterally, in forums other than the Conference on Disarmament or through ad hoc formats outside the established United Nations disarmament machinery. Still, Italy firmly believes in the importance and genuine need of a forum dedicated to global disarmament negotiations that will advance the cause of international peace and disarmament.

To continue asserting that the Conference on Disarmament is not functioning due to a lack of political will is, in our opinion, no longer credible. For example, this year two member States took it upon themselves to organize three well-attended and very successful side events on specific aspects of the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) in an effort to overcome the procedure-driven inertia of the Conference. The side events significantly enhanced the membership's knowledge of key topics of a future Treaty that will prove to be to everyone's advantage once negotiations start.

What is thwarting the Conference on Disarmament is, rather, in our opinion, the misuse of the rules of procedure by a small number of members. In 2009, the Conference adopted by consensus a programme of work to carry out negotiations on an FMCT and to set up four ad hoc working groups, one of which was tasked with undertaking these negotiations. However, the Conference was prevented from implementing the programme of work in the absence of consensus on organizational matters, such as establishing the time, place and chair rotation for the meetings. Further thought should, therefore, be given to reviewing some of the working methods of the Conference so as to make them more effective and more efficient.

Other provisions of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament also warrant a reappraisal. The monthly rotation of the presidency appears to be too frequent, to the detriment of continuity in the Conference's work. As a preliminary suggestion, two presidencies a year would appear to be more appropriate. The President's decision-making authority could also be better specified. Furthermore, the rule requiring the adoption every year of a work programme appears to be unwise. It allows any member, immediately after 31 December, to indefinitely block negotiations. Consideration should be given to maintaining the same programme of work initially adopted by the Conference for the following years unless the membership agrees by consensus on a new one.

Of course, we are not blind to the hurdles in modifying the Conference's rules of procedure. As we stated last year at the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament, there are no procedural solutions to political problems. Nonetheless, we are also convinced that the issue must be addressed with courage and commitment to succeed, while looking to solve the underlying political problems. That requires an effort by the whole membership of the Conference.

Resumption of the work of the Conference on Disarmament can no longer be postponed. It has become a matter of urgency. The ongoing stalemate is quickly destroying what is left of its prestige and authority.

If by the end of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly no decision has been taken to compel the Conference to start negotiations as indicated in CD/1864 — the work programme approved in 2009 — we fear that the proposal to move them outside the Conference will gain momentum. While not enthusiastic regarding such an outcome, Italy will certainly not oppose it, as nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are priority areas of our foreign policy.

To facilitate reaching agreement on the revitalization of the Conference, Italy is open to proposals for future discussions on negative security assurances (NSAs), with a view to a possible future start of negotiations on this question. While a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) represents the tool to stem supplies of the main raw materials of nuclear weapons, NSAs would be needed to reassure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear arms.

Those are two goals that completely reflect our common aspiration of a world free of nuclear weapons. They also represent a way to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. In this context, we should also bear in mind that the conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions adopted last year at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol.I)) mention, as substantive tasks for the Conference, only those two items: FMCT and NSAs.

Today's debate confirms the international community's attention to the Conference and the disarmament machinery in general. The General Assembly can play a specific role in this field, while today's discussions can actually be a catalyst for further action. We hope that as soon as in the Assembly's next session, particularly in the First Committee, we will take this discussion forward and come up with concrete ideas on how to relaunch negotiations in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Kmentt (Austria): I would like to express to you, Mr. President, our appreciation for scheduling today's General Assembly debate on this important agenda item, which had been requested by Austria together with 48 other Member States. However, I would also like to express Austria's disappointment that this debate had actually become a necessity, because it is a clear sign of failure that we have been able neither to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament nor to take forward multilateral disarmament negotiations, as requested in the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament last year.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and also with the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of a cross-regional group of Member States. In addition, we would like to offer the following comments.

Like others, Austria has welcomed the recent positive momentum in international security policy. At the same time, expectations of the international community to engage in concrete multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations continue to be frustrated. The multilateral disarmament machinery, in particular the Conference on Disarmament, remains in deadlock. The momentum that we hoped to generate over the past year did not materialize. While there has been a strong convergence on diagnosing the Conference's illnesses, no agreement on the necessary medicine has been reached so far.

On procedural issues, for instance, in our view the Conference's procedural architecture, particularly its consensus rule, is inadequate for the twenty-first century. Austria finds the procedural hostage-taking of the kind that we see in the Conference unacceptable. It is our shared responsibility to find ways to prevent such a continued abuse of the consensus rule.

Its past successes notwithstanding, the Conference on Disarmament has become a forum where multilateral engagement on disarmament can be pretended safely, given that procedural tools seem to guarantee an unrestricted veto at all times. The Conference's refusal to admit new members and the dismal practice regarding engagement with civil society are other examples of the Conference's obsolete and outdated working methods.

The Conference is not confronted with a procedural problem alone, though. Ultimately, the Conference is and has been in paralysis for such a long time due to political issues, and insufficient political will to overcome them. States members of the Conference cannot agree to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), which Austria would like to see start without delay. There is opposition today from one member State to starting those negotiations.

However, the political issues of the Conference on Disarmament and the reasons for its deadlock go deeper. Responsibility for the Conference and for its paralysis since 1997 is more widely shared. Furthermore, it is not only the FMCT that does not muster consensus. Nuclear disarmament, prevention of an arms race in outer space and negative security assurances are also divisive issues. The ultimate problem is therefore the lack of real political commitment to address disarmament and non-proliferation through multilateralism leading to multilateral treaties. It is this lack of commitment that the Conference on Disarmament has come to epitomize more than any other forum.

This begs the question whether the Conference can in fact still serve as an effective forum for multilateral disarmament negotiations. In Austria's view, the Conference has not only lost much of its credibility but is also risking its legitimacy. For the past 14 years, the Conference has failed to deliver on the mandate. We cannot continue with this wishful-thinking approach, which makes us believe that we are just about to break the impasse in the Conference.

Austria is firmly committed to multilateralism and attaches great importance to the multilateral institutions. Yet those institutions are not a purpose in themselves. Ultimately, we are not committed to the Conference on Disarmament as an institution but to progress on multilateral disarmament negotiations.

After diagnosing the problems, is there a therapy? In our view, there are essentially two options.

On the one hand, we could continue to work through and within the Conference, working with and waiting for member States to finally reach consensus. However, it is clear that political will cannot be forced upon member States. After 14 years of trying in vain to bridge the gaps on a balanced programme of work, this does not look very promising.

States members of the Conference could also try to stimulate progress by addressing the Conference's working methods, for instance by clarifying that the consensus rule does not apply to procedural questions such as the programme of work, or that it could be suspended in exceptional cases. States members could finally admit those States that have expressed their wish to participate in the work of the Conference and facilitate fresh thinking by opening the Conference to outside expertise and input from civil society.

Those would be important steps. However, they, too, have been discussed for many years without real progress. We therefore have doubts both as to the chances of finding agreement on even such modest steps within the Conference and, more importantly, about whether they would actually contribute to bringing about a political breakthrough.

In our view, we should therefore consider another course of action and explore options outside the framework of the Conference also. We could, for example, envisage the General Assembly playing a more active, direct and central role in disarmament negotiations.

The absence of political will — or worse, real commitment to multilateral progress — on the part of some should be no reason to prevent the rest of the international community from moving forward. We believe strongly that political will can also be generated through process, by starting negotiations and addressing the issues that have been stuck on the agenda for so many years. It is against this background that Austria expects that the next session of the First Committee will decide in substance on how to move forward and enable multilateral disarmament negotiations. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

What counts, in the final analysis, is substantive success. We have to ensure that our instruments facilitate success and do not become, to the contrary, an obstacle to success. Since last year's Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, we have a renewed and clear commitment to achieving a world without nuclear weapons. This is a collective commitment and we need to act on it. We must begin focusing in concrete terms on the parameters that will enable us to reach this goal through the Conference on Disarmament, the General Assembly or any other constructive multilateral approach.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me begin by thanking you, Sir, for convening this meeting on such an important issue.

Indonesia fully associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Long committed to a world free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, Indonesia expects that today's discussion will generate clear political momentum to enable us to overcome the obstacles that have continued to hamper progress on multilateral disarmament goals.

At the High-level Meeting of 24 September 2010, we saw a real opportunity to resolve the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament in the wake of the consensus adoption of the Final Document (NPT/CONF.2010/50 (Vol. I)) of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the New START agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation. By any token, those were two significant and highly worthy achievements. A break in the decades-old impasse in nuclear disarmament finally seemed to be in reach. New hope was kindled that, by building on these critical achievements and emerging understanding, the international community could realize the vision of a nuclear-weapons free world in the foreseeable future.

The dismay at the absence of tangible progress on the global nuclear disarmament agenda since the September meeting is thus understandable. The Conference on Disarmament remains unable to agree on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work in Geneva, and the United Nations Disarmament Commission concluded yet another session in New York without agreeing to substantive recommendations.

Despite expressions of commitment last year, there has also been little progress on the implementation of the Final Document of the NPT Review Conference, including its mandate on holding the crucial 2012 conference on the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

Indonesia underscores the importance of delivering fully on internationally agreed commitments in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It is high time that that all States, particularly nuclear-weapon States, honour the commitments they have undertaken on complete nuclear disarmament. Undertaking time-bound actions to that end is the best way to build confidence and to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament can be reinvigorated and meaningful disarmament negotiations commenced.

We should be clear. As stated by the Secretary-General and the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement this morning, it is not that the United Nations disarmament machinery itself is problematic, for it was this machinery which enabled the drafting of guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, as well as for conventional arms control, limitation and disarmament. The Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions, the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, among others, were made possible through this machinery and its predecessor system.

We agree that procedures are very important, but we should not have any illusions. If the will to attain goals is lacking, the best of procedures will not bear fruit. Indonesia is confident that, given the political will, the Conference on Disarmament can advance negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention, negative security assurances, a fissile material cut-off treaty in accordance with the Shannon mandate, and a treaty on the prevention of arms race in outer space.

We also stress the continued validity of the consensus Final Document adopted at first special session on disarmament (resolution S-10/2), which set out a comprehensive disarmament strategy by the largest-ever gathering of States. We urge all States once again to play their part in convening a fourth special session on disarmament and making it a fitting success.

Allow me to conclude by underlining again the significance of this meeting in galvanizing political action for achieving concrete disarmament steps. We must all work together and promote measures to abolish the scourge of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction from our planet. To this end, Indonesia, as in the past, is determined to continue to play an active role.

Mr. Ulibarri (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica welcomes this opportunity for the General Assembly to assess the status of the international disarmament machinery, in particular the Conference on Disarmament. We hope that this debate will revitalize the work of the Conference, renew the political will to transform it, reform its working methods and thereby improve it.

Costa Rica aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands on behalf of 41 States that sponsored resolution 65/93, which lay the groundwork for this debate. Despite its closed membership, its state of deadlock, and our inability to participate in it as a member with full rights, the Conference on Disarmament, for Costa Rica, is still the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. We recognize its leading role in strengthening global security and promoting international stability. We have held this view since 1994, when we expressed our legitimate but unsatisfied interest in participating in the Conference, which we reiterate now as an active member of the Geneva-based informal group of observer States.

Disarmament is not an isolated exercise relating only to military affairs; it is an organic process that interests and affects all of us, and on which we must constantly strive to make progress through productive negotiations. We are therefore greatly concerned at the paralysis in the Conference, its continuing repetition of the same routines and same mistakes, and the significant resources required to maintain its rituals. Through these grave failures, the Conference has compromised its capacity to address emerging security problems and generated justified dissatisfaction and impatience.

However, the major reasons behind the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament are not limited to its current working methods; perhaps more important is the militaristic, as opposed to humanistic, approach that has prevailed to date. The time has come to approach disarmament in terms of its value for human security and arms control through the lens of international humanitarian law and human rights. By doing so, we could turn the conceptual thrust of the debate in a more positive — and, in our view, effective — direction.

The main tools for promoting and maintaining national and international security are not weapons, but respect for human security and dignity and the rule of law. We do not deny the right of countries to military defence, despite the fact that we opted to abolish our armed forces more than 60 years ago. However, we are convinced that while an essentially militaristic approach to security and disarmament might bring us closer to arms regulation and the control of international arsenals, it will never lead to global disarmament.

To be blunt, with the Conference on Disarmament we are experiencing only the illusion of disarmament. It is the illusion that destroying certain weapons signifies progress, despite their being immediately replaced by more powerful ones; it is the illusion whereby certain weapons are proscribed because the strategic advantage they may have is exponentially inferior to that offered by newer and more advanced ones; it is the illusion of fulfilling the requirements of civil society, when in fact the only result is a paralysed, and paralyzing, process.

The Conference on Disarmament, furthermore, operates like a closed club, in which only one third of the States Members of the United Nations have the responsibility of negotiating global disarmament. It is paradoxical, for example, that this group does not include a single one of the 27 countries that do not have armed forces, and thus military disarmament has taken second place to national realities.

Global military spending reached $1.6 trillion in 2010. On its own, this figure tells us little. Yet if we invested just 10 per cent of that sum annually until 2015, the international community would be in a position to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by that date.

Costa Rica believes that any efforts aimed at revitalizing and restructuring the multilateral disarmament negotiations must focus on human security, as we said earlier. That focus was key in the negotiations on banning anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. It was also been instrumental in the preparatory meetings for a robust arms trade treaty.

Nuclear weapons have already been determined to be incompatible with international law and international humanitarian law in particular. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), as well as the unanimous decision taken by the International Court of Justice in 1996, affirm that there is a legal obligation on the part of States to commence and conclude negotiations on the global prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.

To build trust and send a signal of goodwill in order to allow for the commencement of negotiations in the Conference of Disarmament or in another body, the nuclear-weapon States should abandon their plans for the modernization, replacement or upgrading of those weapons.

My delegation does not consider conducive to disarmament the fact that nuclear-weapon States bring to the negotiating table a merely "representative" reduction, while channelling considerable resources into research on and the modernization of facilities that are capable of maintaining or multiplying these threats.

In conclusion, Costa Rica believes that the multilateral disarmament bodies and processes, such as the Conference on Disarmament, could begin to interact and cooperate with the bodies in charge of the promotion and protection of human rights and international humanitarian law, with the goal of more effectively following up on the implementation of States' duties in those areas in the light of their commitments to disarmament.

Costa Rica deems it necessary that the implementation of disarmament agreements be incorporated as a factor in the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council. We sometimes hear that seeking to create a more just and secure world on the basis of a humanitarian approach towards disarmament and arms control is but wishful thinking. We do not agree with this assessment. Rather, what we have observed, as undeniable evidence, is the paralysis in the Conference with respect to the militaristic approach. We still have time to reorient the Conference on Disarmament in such a way as to equip it with new paradigms, better working methods and real compromise.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): Revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations are essential steps towards a more secure world. The international community has repeatedly reaffirmed that the threat posed by the mere existence of nuclear arsenals must be tackled with steadfast political will. Our common purpose must be to achieve the long-sought-after goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We take note with interest of the recent report of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. The difficulty facing the members of the Advisory Board in proposing solutions to the deadlock in the work of the Conference on Disarmament, as is evident in the document, proves that the reasons for the stalemate are political and therefore not related to institutional or procedural issues in the Conference. It is thus important to emphasize the recommendation made in the report that the Secretary-General, if he decides to convene a high-level panel of eminent persons, request a study on the means to revitalize the United Nations disarmament machinery in general.

Brazil believes that any reform effort should consider the United Nations disarmament machinery as a whole and not only the Conference on Disarmament. That is why we support the convening of a fourth special session of the General Assembly on Disarmament, which could examine the institutional structure established by the first special session on disarmament, held in 1978. We discourage any initiatives that try to partially amend the operation of the machinery based on a limited goal and restricted to only one subject, such as, for example, fissile material.

Brazil considers that the Conference on Disarmament is the only body duly constituted by the international community to negotiate nuclear disarmament. While we attach the highest priority to the elimination of nuclear weapons through the adoption of a convention on nuclear disarmament, we support the launching of negotiations on the other three core issues of the agenda of the Conference, namely, fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

We do not endorse the view that only the issue of a treaty on fissile material is ripe for negotiations. Nor do we support the thesis that only one country should be held responsible for the stalemate in the work of the

Conference. If this is true with respect to the subject of a treaty on fissile material, other countries have blocked the negotiation of instruments related to the other agenda items.

Even with regard to a treaty on fissile material, there exists a clear difference of views between Member States. Brazil advocates the negotiation of a treaty that takes into consideration the issue of stocks. A treaty limited to the prohibition of production would have little or no effect on nuclear disarmament.

The criticism of the institutional aspects of the Conference on Disarmament, in particular regarding its rules of procedure, is not consistent. One could ask whether the countries denouncing the abuse of the rule of consensus in negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) would be ready to accept majority decisions on other issues that are under consideration by the Conference. Negotiations affecting the security of States are always sensitive and complex. The rule of consensus is a special procedure of the Conference on Disarmament that reflects this reality.

Brazil supports the consideration of the expansion of the membership of the Conference, as this would promote richer and more comprehensive discussions within that body. We also advocate the increased participation of civil society in following the work of the Conference, since that would contribute to a greater awareness about the challenges faced in the area of nuclear disarmament.

It is certainly a matter of concern that the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament continues to prevail despite the efforts made in the last few years, based on positive developments in the disarmament and non-proliferation scenario, particularly the successful outcome of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The existence of nuclear weapons constitutes the most immediate threat to the survival of humankind. The negotiation of instruments conducive to nuclear disarmament is therefore urgent. The question that one should ask, however, is the following: Would the international community be in a better position to negotiate those instruments without the Conference on Disarmament? Brazil believes that, despite its shortcomings, there really is no alternative to the Conference. That is why revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament cannot mean finding ways to circumvent it.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations

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General Assembly

Sixty-fifth session

Official Records

114th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 27 July 2011, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Deiss .... (Switzerland)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 13 (*continued*)

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

The President (*spoke in French*): Members will recall that the General Assembly held a debate on agenda item 13 jointly with agenda items 115 on the follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit and 120 on the strengthening of the United Nations system at its 52nd plenary meeting on 23 November 2010.

Members will also recall that, under agenda items 13 and 115, the Assembly adopted resolutions 65/1, 65/7, 65/281 and 65/285 at its 9th, 41st, 100th and 105th plenary meetings, respectively. Also under agenda item 13, the Assembly adopted resolutions 65/10, 65/234 and 65/309 at its 52nd, 72nd and 109th plenary meetings, respectively.

By way of an opening remark, I would like to share some thoughts with the Assembly. We have met today to address the challenges related to realizing the human right to water and sanitation and to consider the impact of the realization of that right on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). I extend a very cordial welcome to His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma, whose country, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, is an ardent upholder of this right. I also extend my warmest welcome to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, who will also be participating in this afternoon's discussions.

In July 2010, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation. That decision was a first step towards the explicit acknowledgment of the right to drinking water and sanitation as a human right. Thereafter, in September 2010, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution asserting the right to water and sanitation as deriving from the right to a dignified life and an acceptable standard of living.

For millions of people, access to safe drinking water and sanitation is an urgent development need. MDG 7 calls for the halving by 2015 of the proportion of the global population with no access to drinking water and sanitation. The realization of this Goal is crucial to achieving others, such those concerning poverty reduction, child health and education for all.

The progress achieved after 10 years of effort has been inadequate. There are still 1 billion people with no access to drinking water and more than 2 billion without basic sanitation services. I welcome and support the initiative "Sustainable sanitation — the five-year drive to 2015", launched by the Secretary-General last month.

These figures, along with the drought currently afflicting the Horn of Africa, recall for us the scale of the inequality in today's world with respect to meeting our water needs. While in some regions men, women

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and children die because they lack just a few litres of water, in other regions water is wasted. The human right to water and sanitation is therefore critical to ensuring that everybody enjoys a dignified and free life.

As we will have the opportunity to discuss today, we face many challenges, such as, in many cases, the absence of functional State institutions and limited technical and financial resources. Realizing these rights would represent progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goal on water and the totality of the MDGs.

The 2015 deadline leaves us very little time to take decisive action. In the spirit of the commitment that we made at the High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, which opened the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in September 2010, and in the spirit of the Secretary-General's initiative that I just mentioned, we should daily reaffirm our collective will to achieve the Goals and redouble our efforts to do so. I hope that the Conference on Sustainable Development to be held next year in Rio will spark a new impetus to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.

Today, we have an excellent opportunity to send the message that we have the will to succeed. I encourage speakers to emphasize practical, results-oriented approaches to making the right to water and sanitation a reality.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: At any one time, close to half of all people in developing countries are suffering from health problems caused by poor water and sanitation. Together, unclean water and poor sanitation are the world's second biggest killers of children. While progress is broadly on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal target of reducing by half the number of people without access to safe drinking water, the world will miss the sanitation target. I therefore welcome this plenary meeting.

Last July, the General Assembly recognized the right to water and sanitation. Then, in September, the Human Rights Council specified that this right is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living. Those were important advances. They provide a solid legal framework for Governments and the United Nations system alike. The task now is to translate that commitment into specific obligations at the international and national levels. Only then can people — and especially the poor — realize this right.

Let us be clear — a right to water and sanitation does not mean that water should be free. Rather, it means that water and sanitation services should be affordable and available to all, and that States must do everything in their power to make that happen. It is not acceptable that poor slum-dwellers pay five or even 10 times as much for their water as wealthy residents of the same cities. It is not acceptable that more than 1 billion people in rural communities live without toilets and have to defecate in the open. It is not acceptable that wastewater from slums, farms and industry is allowed to pollute the environment.

Last month, the United Nations launched the "Sustainable sanitation — the five-year drive to 2015" initiative. I spoke then of how the lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation adversely affects children's health and development. I also told of how good sanitation can boost our efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria, simply because people living in hygienic conditions are better prepared to fight off other diseases. I also pointed out that good sanitation and hygiene can increase school performance and reduce absenteeism, especially among adolescent girls, thereby contributing to their empowerment and equality. In short, improved sanitation can contribute to all our development goals.

Many Governments have already included the rights to water and sanitation in their constitutions and domestic legislation. Those Governments that have yet to do so should follow suit without delay. We must reach all those who are denied the water and sanitation services that are necessary for their dignity and well-being. Today, my mind is on the emergency in the Horn of Africa. Millions are struggling merely to survive and scarcely enjoying the full range of their rights. They need immediate assistance, from food and water to adequate sanitation in the camps to which many have been forced to flee.

Such short-term relief, however, must be linked to long-term sustainability. That will require an agricultural transformation that improves the resilience of rural people — especially pastoralists — and minimizes the scale of any future crisis. It means working to realize the right to water and sanitation for all. It means creating the conditions of security necessary for people and communities to thrive. Water, sanitation, stability, prosperity and peace — these goals are closely, inextricably linked. Progress can be ours if we work together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

President Morales Ayma (*spoke in Spanish*): I come here today to express my deepest respect and admiration for the United Nations, first of all for holding this meeting, and also because a year ago here in the General Assembly adopted an historic and unprecedented declaration on the right to water as a universal human right (resolution 64/292).

That leads me to believe that this new millennium will offer the chance to make up for the harm inflicted on the peoples of the world. If today water is a human right thanks to the General Assembly, then water is the mother of all rights. If presidents, Governments and States do not guarantee water as a human right, they will certainly respect no human right anywhere in the world. I therefore believe that we can make significant progress in the United Nations in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights, fulfilling the aspirations of our peoples.

If water is a human right, it must stop being a commodity in private trade. It must be a public service. If water is a human right, it cannot be subject to commerce in the hands of mercenary companies. In issuing this declaration on water as a human right with the approval of the United Nations, we share the obligation to work together and share our experience in order to implement policies to ensure that water can be enjoyed as a human right.

I take this opportunity to give voice to the suffering of the peoples mentioned by the Secretary-General. Children lose their lives and farmers cannot work because of a lack of water. As is the case with any right, the right to water must be respected. And human rights have opponents — policies that lead to inequalities or inflict injustice on people. Water, too, has its opponent; the enemy of this natural resource is global warming. Global warming is water's chief enemy, thanks to which last year my country endured the worst year of drought, frost, and low temperatures. In Bolivia's Amazon region, millions of fish died as a result. On the high plateau, people have had to leave their homes and travel in search of water.

The effects of global warming are a very serious problem that we have had to address through our own efforts. However, as a responsible Government, we are experimenting with new policies under the My Water programme. We are investing more in water, for without water there can be no life. Without water, there can be no food. Without water, there can be no planet Earth. It is thus the obligation of the Governments of nations to guarantee this natural resource, so vital to life.

Fortunately, in Bolivia, thanks to the conscience of our people and our democratic nation, the right to water is enshrined in our Constitution and we therefore have a duty to implement it. With this policy, through our My Water programme, together with our 337 municipalities, we are beginning to prioritize projects and programmes that are not just the initiative of one mayor or one President but respond to the needs of the beneficiaries of our natural resources, such as drinking water for people and water for crops and livestock.

Some representatives may say that providing water for livestock is ridiculous, but there are families whose livelihood depends on animals, and those animals need water. When there is no water on the Bolivian high plateau, families can abandon their communities and their land, but they cannot abandon their livestock. Their livestock are at the mercy of nature. During the rainy season, of course, families return to their lands and recover those animals that have survived the drought. The bodies and skeletons of dead animals strew the fields, but some survive. This is a result of global warming. It affects water; it destroys families, particularly those of poor peasant farmers.

This experience has been a wake-up call to us to implement this programme. Our expectations are high. We have invested $100 million for 10 million inhabitants of Bolivia. We wish to go further by sharing this experience with the Assembly, and to share in other experiences from other countries. I have come here to learn from other speakers. I want to learn from those here and from other leaders in the United Nations how we can complement one another in guaranteeing water as a public service. Alone, we surely cannot solve this problem or those that occur in other regions, countries and continents. We have a duty to think hard and long.

It must not be that in some countries water can be wasted as a luxury, as it is in some countries where people are heedless of how it should be shared but rather compete for it. There is no place for competition here. As developing countries, we have major differences that divide us. Competition of any kind will not solve the problems of poverty or unemployment. But if we can work by cooperating with one another, surely we can do it. Our work, struggle and task are to seek a balance among all human beings.

The United Nations has taken important measures around the world. We have heard that, in some regions, referendums will be held to decide whether water will be a right, a private commodity or a public service. Some 80 or 90 per cent of the people will vote for water as a human right and a public service, and not a private commodity. We do not want to see some multinational companies, as has happened in Bolivia, privatizing water to profit from its sale. How can we sell water? How can water be a private commodity?

We — rural and urban social movements, workers, professionals and intellectuals committed to their countries, indigenous peoples, coca growers — condemn such competition. The year 2000, when we expelled some multinational companies, was a momentous time for us. Some businesses had sought to increase the price of water by 500 per cent. These events led us to think hard and deeply. Through these social movements, we organized and rewrote our Constitution; and we have come to raise these issues in international forums with great respect for the policies and programmes of every country. It is our obligation to share our experiences, as it is for every country to do for the good of the community.

I come from the Bolivian people with our policies to greet the leaders and ambassadors of the United Nations, who a year ago declared here, with great wisdom and intelligence, that water is a human right. If it is a human right, it is now our responsibility to implement that policy defined by the United Nations. I commend the Secretary-General and the Assembly for those policies. We will always be willing to share our experience here.

The President (*spoke in French*): I have invited the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, to participate in this meeting.

If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision just taken and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Ms. De Albuquerque (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank you, Sir, for inviting me to participate in this important meeting. It is an honour and a pleasure to be here today to assess the progress achieved and the continuing challenges with regard to the realization of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

(*spoke in English*)

When, exactly one year ago, following the historic General Assembly vote on the right to water and sanitation (resolution 64/292), journalists asked me about the impact of the recognition of this human right, I immediately recalled the wise words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who said that human rights begin in small places, close to home. And unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Hence today, as we gather to celebrate the first anniversary of the adoption of the resolution, we must ask ourselves the same questions. Will this resolution have any impact on the lives of the billions of people who do not have access to safe water and sanitation? Will it help to prevent the roughly 1.5 million child deaths that occur each year due to water- and sanitation-related diseases? Will it lead to improvements in schools where water is lacking and girls drop out because there are no sex-segregated toilets? Will it help to change the situation in hospitals that are without water and sanitation and face high rates of maternal mortality?

Fatima and John are examples of the billions of people suffering from a lack of safe water and sanitation. I met Fatima and her daughters in one of my country missions. They had to walk for hours every day to fetch water. They could not work or attend school because much of the day was spent in this task. The family often suffered from diarrhoea, and one friend had almost been raped the day before I met them while walking to fetch water.

Two years later, I met John, a homeless man, during another of my missions. The public restrooms in his city had been shut down. John became, as he put it, the sanitation technician for the local homeless community. He improvised a toilet inside a tent where people would defecate into plastic bags. John would then collect and carry away the faeces on his bike, trying to find an open toilet where he could empty the bags.

These human rights violations must be stopped. Resolution 64/292 must serve as the guide for putting an end to the suffering of all the Fatimas and Johns in the world. Am I expecting too much from a resolution of the General Assembly when I expect it to have a tangible impact on people's lives? I do not think so.

The challenges are and will remain great, but the experiences already occurring around the world show that the recognition of water and sanitation as human rights can truly make a difference.

What has the recognition of the right to water and sanitation achieved? When both the Assembly and the Human Rights Council adopted resolutions recognizing water and sanitation as fundamental human rights, States undertook very clear commitments. They recognized that water and sanitation are derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and must, as has already been mentioned, be available in sufficient quantity, accessible, safe, affordable and culturally acceptable to all, without discrimination.

These resolutions raised political attention and helped to crate the sense of urgency that is badly needed to improve access to water and sanitation in the world. In this context, I praise Bolivia, Germany and Spain for their leadership in this regard at the United Nations level. These resolutions entail a new vision for the world we live in — a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation; a world where people do not get sick from the water they drink or make other people sick because they are forced to defecate in the open; a world where people do not have to choose between taking their child to the doctor and paying their water bills.

This new vision requires a shift in the mindset of policymakers, national Governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, the private sector and the people themselves. It means that the most vulnerable, the poorest, the indigenous, the slum-dwellers and the homeless — those who are usually voiceless — are no longer left behind and are prioritized in policymaking. This new vision means that ensuring access to safe drinking water and sanitation is not a gesture of charity or simply a good idea for policymakers. Unlike human rights, good ideas are subject to changing political currents. Good ideas are not legally binding.

Does this mean that human rights ignore the resource limitations every State may face, or the impact of crises? Of course it does not. By recognizing the rights to water and sanitation, States are expected to take deliberate steps to progressively realize these rights, making maximum use of available resources while putting an end to all forms of discrimination in providing access to water and sanitation.

A great deal of progress can be made, even within a climate of limited resources, such as that which we are facing right now. Some of these steps are, for example, the recognition of these rights in national legislation, the adoption of national action plans for the realization of the rights to water and sanitation, and putting the priority on unserved or under-served communities so as to provide a minimal level of access for everyone.

Since the explicit recognition of the right to water and sanitation last year I have received repeated requests for help from Governments, NGOs, service providers and United Nations agencies that want to implement these human rights but need assistance and guidance in doing so.

Over the past three years, I have been collecting good practices. I have received over 200 submissions from the five continents, and I will present a compendium to the Human Rights Council in September. These practices cover a diverse array, demonstrating that there is no single path and showing that the realization of the rights to water and sanitation is within reach.

Let me share some of the examples that I came across. One of them is the arbor loo ecological type of sanitation introduced in different countries, including Malawi, which aims to compost faeces directly in a pit and to subsequently grow a fruit tree — normally a banana tree in Malawi — on this very fertile soil. Selling the bananas becomes a way for the arbor loo owner to make money to pay for this sanitation solution.

Equally, national legal instruments are important tools for the protection of the right to water. In a recent court decision in Botswana, for example, indigenous communities who were evicted from their land and saw their water borehole dismantled successfully brought suit under the country's Water Act. The Appellate Court, informed inter alia by the Assembly's resolution, noted that the water law allowed anyone occupying land to drill boreholes for domestic use without specific water rights and that limiting this right could amount to cruel or inhumane treatment prohibited under the Constitution.

At the global level, I am glad that, thanks to my mandated cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN-Water Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water report will next year include more information related to issues such as national recognition and justifiability of the rights to water and sanitation, as well as public participation and non-discrimination.

Also, the UNICEF-WHO joint monitoring programme, which reviews progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal targets related to access to water and sanitation, is working closely with me in the development of new indicators that will take into account human rights criteria. I am also leading a task force charged with developing indicators to measure non-discrimination and equality in the access to safe water and sanitation.

In this context, let me call on all States Members of the United Nations to apply human rights to the water and sanitation framework when negotiating the post-2015 global development agenda. This is crucial because the current MDG framework does not measure the impact of discrimination on access to water and sanitation. Hence a State can be an MDG hero while having left unchanged the fate of indigenous peoples, slum dwellers, or people with disabilities.

Furthermore, water quality is not yet being monitored worldwide. Affordability of, and the distance to, water and sanitation services are not being assessed at the global level. The harsh reality is that we simply do not know how many people have access to water and sanitation that meets the standards stipulated by the human rights framework of availability, quality, accessibility, affordability and acceptability that the States Members of the United Nations supported last year. Now, and even long after the MDG timeframe has expired, the global development agenda must be aligned with the human rights commitments undertaken by the Assembly.

The lessons I learned over the past three years while conducting missions and meeting with communities and policymakers who work to improve access to water and sanitation demonstrate that these rights are, as I said earlier, within reach. This is true even in countries and communities with very limited resources, even in emergency situations. Of course, numerous challenges remain, including financial and purely technical obstacles. However, I must emphasize that political will and sound management continue to play the most decisive role in the expansion of access to water and sanitation of good quality.

In this spirit, I would conclude by calling on all relevant stakeholders, including States, United Nations agencies, donors, civil society and the private sector to use the human rights framework in all their efforts, at the national and global levels, to ensure access to water and sanitation for all. The point of departure provided by the recognition of the human rights to water and sanitation by both the Assembly and the Human Rights Council is a vital tool in this endeavour. By applying this framework, the results of interventions will be better, outcomes will be more successful and impacts will be more sustained.

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Assembly that there are 35 speakers inscribed on my list. I call on all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable maximum participation, otherwise the debate will continue early next week.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Mr. Serrano (European Union) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before I speak on behalf of the European Union (EU), I should like to welcome the participation in this meeting of the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales, and to thank him for the leadership he has shown in connection with this very important issue and for his statement this afternoon. I welcome also the statement made by the Secretary-General and the participation of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque.

(spoke in English)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States.

The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. President, the European Union would like to thank you for having organized this meeting of the General Assembly on a topic of the utmost importance. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is essential for people to live in health and dignity. All countries bear the responsibility of ensuring that people enjoy their full human rights and that they have equal access to health care, education, safe drinking water and sanitation, and social and other basic services. The European Union acknowledges the recent recognition of the human right to water and sanitation by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council's specification that this right is part of the human right to an adequate standard of living.

While also recalling that there are different positions within the United Nations membership on the relevant resolutions, the European Union believes that it is important that the international community demonstrate united political will to address the global water and sanitation crisis.

In addition, the management of water resources affects all sectors that are important for inclusive growth and sustainable development, such as energy generation, agriculture, food security and the environment, as well as peace and security.

As a result, there has been a growing international recognition among policymakers of the importance of water and sanitation for sustainable and human development, including thanks to the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community made access to safe drinking water and sanitation a top priority. On this basis, we have collectively made substantial headway towards reaching this goal.

However, there is no room for complacency, as access to safe drinking water and sanitation remains a matter of life and death for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Some 884 million people still lack access to improved water sources, while more than 2.6 billion people lack access to acceptable sanitation.

Furthermore, about a third of the world's population lives in areas affected by water stress, and the demand for water is increasing. Investments in water infrastructure are lagging far behind in developing countries, especially in Africa, making them vulnerable to droughts and floods, with dramatic social, environmental and economic impacts. Access to water and sanitation is a particularly acute problem in the urban environment, where rapid population growth in cities in the developing world is putting additional pressure on infrastructure and services.

The EU is fully aware of the fundamental importance of access to water and sanitation, both from the human rights perspective and as a key development issue. The EU will further prioritize sustainable water management in its future development policy.

The EU and its member States have a strong political commitment to and a close collaboration with African countries in the water sector. This was reflected in the African Union/EU Joint Strategy agreed in Libya in November last year. Last year, the EU also launched an MDG initiative which provides €1 billion for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and has a focus on water and sanitation.

Overall, we have recently witnessed a reinforced commitment from the EU and its member States to water in recognition of the challenges related to climate change and the need for green growth. Furthermore, Germany and France will host, respectively, a conference on the water-energy-food nexus, to be held in Bonn in November 2011, and the World Water Forum in Marseille, in March 2012.

The EU also welcomes the efforts being led by the World Health Organization and UNICEF to look at the post-2015 development framework for water and sanitation, and we acknowledge the importance of the global monitoring of the quality, affordability and accessibility of water and sanitation services.

To conclude, let me point out that the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held in June 2012, offers a unique opportunity for the world to secure a renewed political commitment for sustainable development.

The EU and its member States are determined to contribute to making the Rio+20 Conference a success. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation and the sustainable management of water resources should figure prominently in the Rio+20 Conference and its outcome. This should complement and support our efforts to secure the full realization of the MDGs and the promotion of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Brazil welcomes this opportunity to discuss challenges to the full realization of the right to drinking water and sanitation, at the initiative of Bolivia. It is a pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We listened very carefully and with great interest to his statement, and we echo his call for greater cooperation, action and solidarity in connection with this very important issue. I should like also to thank Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, and I commend her for her outstanding work.

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a precondition for poverty eradication. Our efforts to develop our societies are closely linked to progress in this area. At the national level, Brazil is working to ensure universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Internationally, we have shared our experience and have learned from others in the management of water resources, in particular in arid and semi-arid areas.

Brazil recognizes the right to access to drinking water and sanitation as intrinsically related to respect for the rights to life, physical integrity, health, food and adequate housing. As with rights in the social and economic field, it is the responsibility of the State to guarantee the full enjoyment of those rights for their citizens. Respect for this right is fully compatible with the principle of the sovereign right of States to make use of their own water resources, as enshrined in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

In deepening our consideration of the challenges that implementing the right to drinking water and sanitation presents, we must recognize the central role of the human rights entities of the United Nations. Brazil firmly supports the efforts of the Special Rapporteur to clarify the nature and content of the obligations associated with the right to water and sanitation. In this regard, we look forward to considering, through her report to the sixty-sixth session, the challenges related to the achievement of this right.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held next year, will offer another opportunity to return to the subject of access to water and sanitation in the context of sustainable development. We hope to work intensively with all Member States to achieve meaningful results in this area that can lead to realization of the right to drinking water and sanitation.

Mr. Fernández-Arias Minuesa (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to welcome this debate on the human right to drinking water and sanitation and its impact on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a year after the adoption of resolution 64/292 on the recognition of the right to water and sanitation.

The resolution reminds us that this right is already recognized in international law and thus legally binding. Spain commends the fact that all our synergies are focused today on implementing this right, as reflected in resolutions 15/9 and 16/2 of the Human Rights Council. The latter is particularly relevant, since it renewed the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The work of the Special Rapporteur and former Independent Expert, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, has made it possible to lay the foundations for recognition of access to drinking water and sanitation today. I would like to express Spain's gratitude for the commendable work of the Special Rapporteur, who is here today, which has given us a solid working base from which to implement this right as a human right.

The recognition of the right to water must be considered from the human rights perspective. While international cooperative efforts have helped to mitigate the situation, it can be improved only if tackled from this perspective. It was exactly this conviction that moved Spain, together with Germany, to take the initiative five years ago of considering the human right to drinking water and sanitation in the Human Rights Council in Geneva. My country recognizes the universality of all human rights, be they civil, political, economic, social or cultural. Moreover, we believe that there is a direct link between respect for all human rights and the achievement of the MDGs, as the Special Rapporteur indicated in her statement today.

I wish to highlight her recommendation that States need to understand how to fully realize the human right to water and sanitation by drawing up national action plans that must be integrated into poverty reduction strategies and national budgets. It is not acceptable that nearly 900 million people lack drinking water and that more than 2.5 billion have no access to basic sanitation.

Today, States and other actors involved understand exactly what their human rights obligations are in this area. The current challenge, therefore, is in their effective implementation and achievement. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of identifying best practices, as the Special Rapporteur did. The criteria for best practices in water and sanitation include the identification of standards based on human rights norms, as well as shared criteria based on such principles as non-discrimination, participation, responsibility, impact and, of course, sustainability. These criteria must be taken into account while ensuring that the right to drinking water and sanitation is being effectively implemented.

Spain was among the 122 States that voted in favour of the resolution on this issue presented to the Assembly by the Plurinational State of Bolivia exactly one year ago. We therefore welcome today's debate and the presence of Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque, who has contributed so much to the issue. Spain believes that a great deal of work has been done that we can support in order to further the full realization of this right as effectively as possible.

Mr. Gutiérrez (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for taking the initiative of convening Member States for this event in order to enable us to reflect together on a subject that requires commitment on the part of every Government worldwide to ensuring the due realization of the human right to water. On behalf of my delegation and the State of Peru, I would also like to welcome the presence here of His Excellency the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Mr. Evo Morales Ayma.

International human rights norms include specific obligations regarding access to drinking water. They require States to guarantee access for all to sufficient drinking water for personal and domestic use, which includes consumption, sanitation, washing clothes, preparing food and personal and domestic hygiene. These norms also require States to continue progressively to ensure improved access to adequate sanitation services as a prerequisite for human dignity and private life, and to protect the quality of drinking water supplies and resources.

In the view of Peru, water is a renewable natural resource, essential to life and a strategic part of sustainable development and the maintenance of the systems and natural cycles that sustain it, as well as being essential to our nation's security. Through our legislation, it is endowed with sociocultural, economic and environmental value and must therefore be exploited through integrated management that balances all those values. We consider water to be an integral part of our ecosystems and a resource that is renewed by the hydrological cycle. In that context, Peru believes that the use and integrated management of water resources must take the following principles into consideration.

The first of these is the valuation of water and its integrated management. Second, access to water must be prioritized. Third, the public should participate in making decisions that affect the quality, quantity and availability of water, and any other water-related issues. Fourth, investments in water — be they public, private or a combination of the two — must be legally secured. Fifth, the water rights of peasant and indigenous communities must be respected. Sixth, water resources must be used and conserved in a sustainable way. Seventh, water resource management should be decentralized. Finally, efficiency in water use and conservation must be a priority.

With the adoption of resolution 64/292 a year ago, the international community took a significant step forward in raising awareness of the importance of guaranteed access to water, especially to those for whom it is scarce. Peru played an active role throughout the process of identifying the obligations surrounding the right to drinking water and sanitation, with a view to its ultimate recognition as a human right. We participated in the consultations that were held first in Geneva and then in New York, and that led to the resolution's adoption. Peru supported that adoption in keeping with the principles I enumerated earlier, which are based on our domestic legislation and on the assumption that the guarantee of that human right must be subject to the local management, planning and adequate allocation of resources necessary to full enjoyment of that right. In other words, in realizing that right, administrations must adopt a comprehensive approach that recognizes the multidimensional impact of the human right to water.

Much remains to be done for States to implement this right, beginning with their full understanding of its implications in line with national laws and priorities. Peru reaffirms that the human right to water and sanitation derives from the right to an adequate standard of living and is inextricably linked to the highest attainable level of physical and mental health, and to the right to life and human dignity. In that vein, we assert our adherence to those principles and renew our promise to keep working to ensure that they become an increasingly palpable reality.

Mr. Barton (United States of America): The United States is deeply committed to finding solutions to our world's water challenges. In the United States Strategy for Meeting the Millennium Development Goals, released in September 2010, we welcomed progress, recognizing that over 1.6 billion people gained access to improved sources of drinking water between 1990 and 2005. At the same time, the United States expressed its concern that in many countries, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation remains unacceptably high.

At the September 2010 session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the United States joined consensus on resolution 15/9, which affirms

> "that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (*A/HRC/RES/15/9, para. 3*).

Both tenets are drawn from the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and they call upon Governments to take steps towards the progressive realization of this human right. At the Human Rights Council in March, the United States supported the renewal of the mandate of the Independent Expert on this issue.

In the context of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, we believe the following. First, Governments should strive to progressively realize universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation and should seek to expand access, especially for underserved populations. Governments should develop and implement national policies and strategies, where needed, and commit sufficient budgetary resources so that they will be able to advance this goal as quickly as possible.

Secondly, Governments have an obligation to ensure that access to safe drinking water and sanitation services is provided on a non-discriminatory basis. Governments also have obligations to provide or ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation to persons in their custody.

Thirdly, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation can reasonably be interpreted to include access to cooking water. It can also be reasonably understood to mean water in sufficient quantity and quality — although not necessarily potable quality — to meet basic needs regarding personal hygiene.

Finally, in support of all of that, Governments should work towards greater transparency and accountability in water and sanitation service provision, and include the public in Government decision-making. Good governance is fundamental to the achievement of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In this regard, we would like to recognize and applaud the efforts of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation and its commitment to implementing water and sanitation initiatives through its "Sustainable sanitation — five-year drive to 2015" initiative, which targets decision-makers in an effort to build political will for water and sanitation programmes.

The United States hopes that this plenary meeting, aimed at providing dialogue, will also lead Governments to take concrete action to reduce the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Mr. Bonne (France) (*spoke in French*): France aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. I would like to thank the Bolivian Mission for the initiative to convene this meeting. My country welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292, whereby the General Assembly recognized the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. It has enabled us over the past year to intensify mobilization of Governments and others on this issue. Following that historic step forward, the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus its resolution 15/9 of 30 September 2010, which links the basic right to water to the right to an adequate standard of living.

With the full involvement of all stakeholders on the issue of safe drinking water and sanitation, we need to move forward by implementing those resolutions and making the right of all to safe drinking water and sanitation a reality. In that spirit, France is committed, in the framework of an open, informal and trans-regional group of States — the Blue Group — to promoting the right to drinking water and sanitation and to working for its implementation. In that regard, we commend the excellent analysis, assessment and advocacy efforts of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Other praiseworthy initiatives seek to raise awareness of these new texts and the commitments they entail, and seek to work for their implementation. I especially welcome the Secretary-General's initiative on sanitation.

France welcomes the work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in the context of its Protocol on Water and Health, particularly the preparations under way for a handbook on good practices for equitable access to water. We also thank the many countries that supported our introduction of World Health Assembly resolution 64/24, enabling its adoption by consensus. That resolution calls on States members of the World Health Organization and the United Nations generally, as well as other stakeholders, to ensure enhanced integration of water, sanitation and public health policies with a view to achieving full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

My country will host the sixth World Water Forum in Marseille from 12 to 17 March 2012. The right to drinking water and sanitation is a priority of France's international activities, and the Forum will be an opportunity to step up our mobilization in this area. We must recall the prime responsibility of States in creating an adequate organizational framework for realizing that right and mechanisms for monitoring its enforcement. We attach particular importance to delineating the respective roles of the various stakeholders.

Convinced that only joint action at the various levels of political decision-making will enable significant steps forward adapted to each individual context, we call for greater recognition of the role of local authorities in delivering State services in the context of national laws and regulations. All public stakeholders concerned must mobilize and commit to implementing cooperative solutions that will guarantee effective and equitable access to drinking water for all.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express Egypt's appreciation for the convening of this meeting to discuss the challenges of realizing the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. We welcome His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and thank him for his initiative to call for this debate, which is supported by a number of Member States, and for his preparations for this meeting.

The General Assembly adopted the important resolution 64/292 at its sixty-fourth session, recognizing the human right to safe and clean water and sanitation and supporting international efforts towards the full realization of all human rights. Egypt reaffirms that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and must be enjoyed on an equal basis and in an integrated manner. It stresses the importance for Member States to take all necessary measures at the national level to ensure the fulfilment of the requirements to achieve human rights for all, in accordance with international humanitarian law and obligations under international treaties.

In this context, Egypt believes that it is necessary to work towards addressing all the challenges faced by our peoples, especially in developing countries, in ensuring access to clean drinking water and sanitation, taking into account national and regional particularities, while adhering to the terms of international and regional treaties on international watercourses and transboundary water resources, and avoiding the identification of sub-categories of human rights that differ from those stipulated in internationally agreed human rights instruments.

The outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting to review the progress made on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (resolution 65/1) reaffirmed our commitment to reducing the number of people lacking access to clean drinking water and sanitation by 50 per cent. Although several international reports indicate the possibility of achieving this goal by 2015, Egypt believes that several challenges could hinder the fulfilment of this commitment, the biggest of which is obtaining the funding for the implementation of relevant national programmes, which is estimated at $11.2 billion annually.

In addition, we need to redouble our efforts to address the negative consequences of climate change; achieve sustainable development, especially economic and social development; control population growth; and strengthen international cooperation in the field of technology transfer, scientific research and development, particularly in the field of drinking water and sanitation.

In this context, several years ago the Government of Egypt adopted an integrated national plan in the field of water resources in a manner that supports good governance, in order to ensure the equitable and fair distribution of clean drinking water and the provision of sanitation services to its people, without prejudice to the environment. The implementation of this plan is based on decentralization, with the full cooperation of concerned ministries and national agencies, in order to improve the efficiency of water use to sustain good health; combat the negative consequences of climate change; support the role of national water boards and the participation of the private sector in managing the water sector; continuously update and exchange data and information among the relevant national entities; coordinate national investments; and rationalize water usage, giving a bigger role to women in this regard.

Realizing the goal of providing access to clean drinking water and sanitation for all the peoples of the world will require the adoption of a comprehensive and integrated international approach based on several main pillars, the most important of which are addressing the challenges posed by climate change; promoting international cooperation in the field of water technology; providing the needed financial resources and official development assistance to support national programmes and policies for the provision of clean drinking water and sanitation; supporting sustainable development programmes, especially in relevant countries; and developing technologies that prevent pollution.

In this context, the United Nations and the international community must intensify their joint endeavours to develop integrated studies in order to address the major challenges hindering the realization of the right of the peoples of the world to clean drinking water and sanitation, taking into account the different challenges posed by the circumstances and particularities of each Member State.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba welcomes the participation in this debate of our dear comrade, President Evo Morales Ayma of the brotherly Plurinational State of Bolivia. Of course, we fully support his statement and thank him for his personal leadership and that of his country on matters of the greatest importance to the international community, such as that under consideration by the Assembly today.

Water is at the very heart of the survival of humankind. As was wisely affirmed by President Morales Ayma, water is life. Resolution 64/292 on the human right to water and sanitation, adopted a year ago upon the initiative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, was a milestone. For the first time, the United Nations recognized the right to drinking water and sanitation as a fundamental human right.

As we speechify in this Hall, more than 884 million people on this planet are without access to sources of drinking water, and 2.6 billion people, almost 1 billion of them children, are without access to basic sanitation. We cannot passively accept the fact that each year more 3.5 million people die of diseases borne by polluted water, and that one out of every eight people in the world are without drinking water. Unless we act rapidly and effectively, more than 3 billion will suffer water shortages by 2025.

Most people on this planet live in developing countries where the main use of water is for agriculture. Hence, a shortage of water due, inter alia, to climate change means that agriculture, aquaculture and other forms of food production will be seriously affected, worsening the already parlous food security of developing countries.

International cooperation must be enhanced, and financial funds and mechanisms that are not subject to the discriminatory dictates and conditionalities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund need to be created. These international funds, whether or not they are sponsored by the United Nations, must provide tangible financial and technological resources to extend the coverage of drinking water, sanitation, agricultural and aquacultural production, integrated water production and the sustainable management of ecosystems.

In 1995, Cuba achieved the Millennium Development Goal on access to drinking water and sanitation and believes that access to water is a fundamental human right. In our country, the State is responsible for the management and control of water and sanitation. We have taken many measures to guarantee the human right to water. Allow me to mention just a few.

We have improved the supply and quality of water, increasing its rational use. We have reduced by 30 per cent the volume of water used in production-related processes. We have achieved annual decreases in the morbidity rate associated with waterborne diseases. We have supplied drinking water to more than 96 per cent of the population. We have increased the coverage, chlorination levels and quality of drinking water. We have developed early warning systems for drought.

Despite this progress, and as is the case for other developing countries, Cuba faces varied challenges with respect to climate change, natural disasters and water shortages.

The criminal economic, financial and trade blockade imposed by the United States Government on Cuba for over half a century has entailed considerable limitations and obstacles to access to new technology, water industry products and their benefits, as well as to achieving increased professional training in these areas.

Cuba does not support plans to privatize water or market mechanisms promoted by multinational corporations as an alleged solution to shortages of natural resources, including water. Equitable access to water and sanitation, without discrimination and in sufficient quantities, is a fundamental right and must not be manipulated as yet another opportunity to make a profit. The United Nations must be the principal forum in which to debate this issue and achieve agreements on it.

Mr. Askarov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Today's debate on water and the main challenges in realizing the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and their impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gives us an opportunity to discuss this very important topic.

On 20 July, the Security Council discussed the impact of climate change on security (see S/PV.6587) in the broader sense of the term. In many statements made on that occasion, direct allusion was made to the fact that water shortages are one of the main challenges to many regions of our planet.

Today, nobody disputes the incontrovertible truth that our planet, with each passing year, is unfortunately experiencing increasing numbers of natural catastrophes and the impact of climate change. Over the past year, we have seen earthquakes of unprecedented destructive force in Haiti, Japan, Chile and New Zealand. We have seen floods in Pakistan and Australia. We have seen severe droughts in the United States, China and the Horn of Africa.

In Central Asia, we are also seeing alarming symptoms of these phenomena. The glaciers of the Pamir and Tian Shan mountains, which are the main sources for the Amu Darya and Sir Darya rivers, are melting. This year, our region experienced an extremely severe drought, which affected the socioeconomic development of the countries of the region, including the achievement of the MDGs. We have seen reduced food production, degradation of the environment and other negative consequences of ecological crises.

Allow me to provide just one example. What was once the fourth-largest continental body of water in the world, the Aral Sea, has disappeared and has turned into the Aralkum — a gigantic desert. In that regard, the rational and reasonable use of water and energy resources is one of the main challenges facing Central Asia. Haphazard and ambiguous approaches to this challenge will only lead to a worsening of ecological disasters.

Today in the Aral region, we are experiencing not just ecological but also socioeconomic and demographic problems with global consequences, as the Secretary-General saw with his own eyes during his visit to the Aral region in April 2010.

I would like to note that we in Uzbekistan are implementing a series of programmes for rationalizing water use and making it more efficient. In the context of agricultural reform, we have set up water users' associations. We have reduced the land area dedicated to cotton growing, which now accounts for only 25 per cent of our arable land. Despite the intensive economic development of our country, we are reducing our water intake from rivers. We have spent over $1 billion on restoring our soil over the past few years. As a result, we have now increased our arable land by 740,000 hectares.

Despite all this, it must be acknowledged that 3 million of our people do not have access to clean drinking water. Uzbekistan has almost 50 per cent of the entire population of the Central Asian region and has endured the brunt of the Aral disaster. We feel that we have the moral right to call for coordinated efforts on the part of States of the region to ensure a rational and reasonable use of water resources. Furthermore, Central Asia must fully implement the United Nations conventions on water and joint water use, including the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes of 17 March 1992 and the Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 21 May 1997. Both documents clearly stipulate that all decisions on the use of transboundary watercourses, including the construction of hydroelectric power stations, must in no way harm the environment and or the interests of neighbouring countries.

Guided by these generally accepted international legal principles and norms, Uzbekistan categorically opposes any construction of large hydroelectric power stations in the high reaches of the rivers of Central Asia that does not take into account the interests of the countries in the lower regions of the rivers. As stated by our President at the MDG summit in September 2010,

> "any attempt to implement projects drafted 30 to 40 years ago in the Soviet period to build large-scale hydropower facilities upstream, including enormous dams — plans that do not take into account the seismicity of the area, which the proposed construction could raise by eight to nine points — could inflict irreparable damage on the environment and create a very dangerous man-made catastrophe" (*A/65/PV.3, p. 15*).

The International Commission on Large Dams, which Uzbekistan joined last year, has said in its research that major dams built on transboundary watercourses can entail great risks in many respects.

In 2008, the United Nations began raising the alarm on increasing food shortages. Climate change and water shortages are undermining food production and even endangering lives. Without secure water supplies, we cannot talk about security, stability or the human right to life. As is stated in the basic text of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations — and Uzbekistan fully agrees — fresh water should be used primarily for the production of food. This is particularly relevant for Central Asia, where every State must be rational and responsible in its use of water resources, on which the life and security of every country, the entire region and every human being depend.

Mr. Berger (Germany): Germany fully aligns itself with the statement made by Permanent Observer of the European Union.

Let me start by thanking the Presidents of the General Assembly and of Bolivia for convening this important plenary meeting on the human right to water and sanitation. We are particularly honoured today by the presence of His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. The debate today gives us an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved and, more important, on the challenges ahead.

The past 12 months have witnessed the recognition, first in the General Assembly and then in the Human Rights Council in Geneva, of the human right to water and sanitation that is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living at the United Nations. That breakthrough is the result of years of engagement of interested national Governments, civil society organizations around the globe, national human rights institutions and experts at the international and national levels.

Germany is proud to have been part and parcel of the process right from the beginning. In 2008, Germany and Spain launched an initiative in the

Human Rights Council to create the mandate of the then Independent Expert on the question. We have witnessed growing support for our initiative, which in 2011 led to the creation by the Human Rights Council of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. That important step forward would not have been possible without the crucial support of many like-minded Member States from all regional groups.

The great challenge now is to implement the decisions that we collectively took. Talking about the human right to water and sanitation, we cannot but reiterate the necessity to think in broader terms than simply technical feasibility questions. We must use a human rights approach if we want to create sustainable solutions. The questions of safety, quality, sufficiency, availability, the physical and economic accessibility and the affordability of water and sanitation must receive adequate attention when we create solutions for those in need. Ignoring such parameters means ignoring the real needs of those who are the bearers of such human rights.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We should also take into account that there is no one size fits all when it comes to implementation in individual country situations. However, the common denominator remains the same — the realization of the right to safe water and sanitation. In that regard, we look forward to discussing the compendium of best practices that will be presented by the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council in September. In that context, and taking into account the link between human rights and the Millennium Development Goals, highlighted also today by the Secretary-General, we are particularly pleased by the fact that the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for the Water and Sanitation Sector has adapted and aligned its criteria regarding access to water and sanitation to those defined by the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Before I close, I would like to encourage like-minded Member States of all regions of the world to engage in the promotion and implementation of the human right to water and sanitation and to make sure that a human rights approach is maintained when discussing national solutions and designing national action plans.

Mr. García González (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We commend the initiative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the leadership of President Evo Morales and of the President of the General Assembly to convene this plenary debate on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation.

Water is the basis of all forms of life. It is vital to human beings, animals and the environment. Access to drinking water and sanitation is necessary for a dignified life. Many human rights cannot be enjoyed without water. Hence, water is very important for well-being and social development. In fact, all great civilizations have always developed close to large water supplies.

Access to drinking water is a fundamental human right that the Government of El Salvador fully supports and that currently is jeopardized principally by two major factors that affect that vital liquid: shortage and pollution. According to research, one-fifth of the world population does not have access to sources of safe water. Every day, 6,000 people, most of them children, die because of polluted water.

The level of access to water and sanitation supply services in El Salvador remains low, in particular in rural areas. However, under the current Administration of President Mauricio Funes Cartagena, a series of projects is being developed in various areas to improve the supply and quality of the vital fluid in the country. The sustainable and comprehensive management of water is seen by the Government of our country as a participatory process aimed at achieving the internationally agreed goals of protection, conservation, defence and prevention regarding the quality and availability of clean water in order to ensure the right of access for the entire population and future generations through efficient coordination of public policies.

On 28 July 2010, El Salvador joined a large group of sponsors in adopting resolution 64/292, entitled "The human right to water and sanitation", in the plenary of the General Assembly. That was certainly an important step in international efforts to promote sustainable human development.

However, in order to effectively implement that declaration of water as a human right, in practice it must go hand in hand with a series of measures to prevent the waste, pollution and financial exploitation of water. Water is increasingly becoming the key element in numerous conflicts that may result in social violence.

Access to drinking water and sanitation as a human right must be fair, non-discriminatory, adequate in terms of quantity and quality, economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and affordable. It is therefore the duty of the State to protect people from being disconnected from water services and from pollution and to prevent violation of the rights of others by individuals or companies.

We cannot ignore the role of forests in the conservation of water. When large areas of forest are destroyed, that has a negative impact on the entire water system, leading to a drop in the availability and quality of the water. It is equally important to regulate activities connected to mining, oil prospecting and industrial agriculture, which are direct sources of water pollution.

We are all responsible for ensuring that everyone, in particular the most needy and excluded groups, can enjoy their basic needs and access to drinking water and sanitation. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals should help to meet such needs. However, much remains to be done until everyone can exercise their full right to water and sanitation. In our delegation's opinion, the issue should be a significant part of the discussions on the substantive content of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

To conclude, the Government of El Salvador shares the view that States should implement measures for a more rational use of that resource.

Ms. Burgstaller (Sweden): Sweden fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Sweden welcomes the convening of today's plenary discussion on the right to water and sanitation. Access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is absolutely central for human life, health and dignity. The right to water and sanitation is now recognized the world over as a human right, derived from the rights to health and to an adequate standard of living in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and confirmed by decisions taken by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

In light of this, Sweden welcomed the consensus adoption of a resolution in the Human Rights Council in March this year that established the post of Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. We commend the Special Rapporteur for her excellent work, and we thank her for her presentation here today.

States must now ensure that everyone has access to safe drinking water for basic personal use and that water supply is organized in a non-discriminatory way. The efficient, fair and sustainable management of water resources is an important prerequisite for sustainable development, inclusive economic growth and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The upcoming 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development offers a strategic opportunity for all of us to further address the challenge of improving water resource management at all levels, and to make safe water and basic sanitation accessible to all, in particular to women, who often play a central role in securing the water supply at the local level and for households needs.

Up to now, the work that has been done in the Human Rights Council and other United Nations human rights bodies has helped us define the obligation of States in relation to the right to water and sanitation, and has given us a strong basis for the work that lies ahead — respecting and implementing this recently recognized right on the ground to make it a reality for everyone.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines warmly welcomes His Excellency Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. We are grateful for his personal involvement and for Bolivia's championing of this worthy initiative.

Last year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was an enthusiastic sponsor of resolution 64/292, in which the General Assembly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential to the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Resolution 64/292 built upon previous resolutions of the Human Rights Council, and has subsequently been reinforced by Human Rights Council resolution 15/9, which strengthened the legal framework surrounding the General Assembly's recognition of this critical human right.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has devoted tremendous resources to the achievement of the right to water and sanitation in recent years. In the past decade, we have increased access to pipe-borne water from 70 per cent to over 98 per cent through prudent infrastructural and organizational investments. We have markedly improved sanitation through the establishment of new water distribution systems, modern sewage treatment facilities, and vastly enhanced garbage collection and disposal.

Our modest national success in realizing and entrenching this human right has taught us that the right to water and sanitation is eminently achievable if the requisite resources and political will are present. The international community has often given voice to a political commitment to the achievement of this right, but too often we have left much of the hard work in this regard to heroic civil society organizations and small business-persons that lack the capacity to effect the sort of multisectoral change that is needed.

We must now act to operationalize the call of last year's resolution

> "to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer, through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all" (*resolution 64/292, para. 2*).

Our ability to answer this call will be the standard upon which we will be judged by the 884 million people who lack access to safe drinking water and the 2.6 billion who do not have access to basic sanitation.

This meeting must also recognize the fragility of recent gains in developing countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the urgency of looming threats to the right to safe drinking water. Climate change and desertification threaten to undo recent progress in achieving the right to water, and will further stymie efforts to extend water and sanitation to the hundreds of millions who inexcusably live without these basic necessities.

Recent unseasonal droughts in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have forced the Government to transport drinking water by ship to other islands in our archipelago, and have affected our agricultural capacity and our ability to generate hydroelectricity. Sea-level rise is threatening the water tables in small island developing States, and may soon have a disastrous effect on access to drinking water, farming and livestock in those communities.

According to UN-Water, the number of States categorized as "water scarce" will increase by 50 per cent by 2025. This scarcity, and the tensions that it will inevitably engender, will have obvious security implications in the coming years.

In fulfilment of the right to water, development cooperation and increased resources are critical. Additionally, the international community must begin to mainstream the issue of water in the global political agenda, link climate change more closely to water access, and consider the true value of the water that is used, overused and wasted in many countries, particularly developed countries.

At the United Nations, there is no shortage of important and well-meaning resolutions and declarations on the topic of water and sanitation. We have General Assembly resolutions, Human Rights Council resolutions, and reports of independent experts and special rapporteurs. The Millennium Development Goals have established a target of halving by 2015 the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation — a target that unfortunately appears to be woefully out of reach.

Three years ago, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared 2008 the year of the bottom billion. For the nearly 1 billion who lack safe drinking water, the time for noble sentiments is long past. As we continue to casually flush our toilets, toss our half-consumed bottles of imported spring water into the trash and luxuriate in another long shower, let us resolve to act meaningfully for those who risk their lives and consume their days simply in search of a mouthful of unpolluted water.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I convey the warm regards of the people and Government of Nicaragua to President Evo Morales Ayma, and acknowledge and thank him for the leadership of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in the recognition of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life. From the outset, Nicaragua was a proud supporter of this initiative, which culminated in the adoption of resolution 64/292.

The Government of Reconciliation and National Unity headed by Commandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra considers it essential that the human being be seen as the central focus of development, in full respect for the human rights of Nicaraguans, particularly in the implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights that enable them to enjoy a decent standard of living. In this regard, and considering that water and sanitation are vital to individual health and dignity, my Government has striven to invest in and draw up national plans for improving access to water and sanitation. Similarly, we are firmly opposed to the privatization efforts initiated under previous Governments. The human right to water, the life of human beings, can never be privatized.

There are 884 million people who still lack drinking water and 2.6 billion without basic sanitation. The insufficient and inadequate supply of drinking water is a persistent health issue worldwide. Eighty per cent of diseases in the developing world are the result of a lack of clean water and adequate sanitation, and thus one of the chief causes of sickness and death, particularly in children.

This grim picture should inspire Member States to continue to work together in the quest for full attainment of the human right to drinking water and sanitation. It should also inspire the international community to mobilize technical assistance and cooperation in support of national action plans and initiatives related to the provision of access to drinking water and sanitation. Achieving access to water and sanitation is essential to human development and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In that regard, water and sanitation have not been accorded the attention necessary to increase and sustain progress towards the attainment of an important part of the MDGs, to which they are closely linked.

What must be done is to plan and implement cooperation and development assistance efforts in accordance with human rights standards and principles, including the right to water and sanitation, as well as with human rights obligations relating to non-discrimination, among others, ensuring that adequate and effective measures are taken to identify and address any negative consequences for human rights.

Without sustainable management of water that takes all the needs of present and future generations into account, we run the growing risk of finding ourselves trapped, not only as concerns development and survival for many of the world's most dispossessed peoples, but also in situations that are a potential threat to international peace and security. Only the dawning awareness of our peoples that it is impossible to continue with unsustainable models of consumption and production will enable us to save Mother Earth and, eventually, all the human beings on our planet.

Mr. Andrianarivelo-Razafy (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to offer the Government of Madagascar's thanks to the President for organizing this important meeting, which will enable the States Members of the United Nations to discuss the crucial subject of the human right to water and sanitation.

One year after the General Assembly's adoption in July 2010 of its historic resolution 64/292 on the fundamental right to water and sanitation, the time has come to launch a genuine dialogue designed to map the road that leads directly to the full and effective implementation of that right, so essential to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and above all to identify the challenges and obstacles to which we must find lasting solutions. Along with all earlier decisions and actions, the resolution has contributed significantly to efforts to achieve our stated goal of halving the number of those lacking access to drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

Water is essential to human life. Madagascar believes that access to water and sanitation is a genuine basic right that should be respected without exception or discrimination. That being the case, every State and Government has the duty and obligation to ensure each of its citizens' full enjoyment of that right. With this vision as the guiding principle for its actions, the Government of Madagascar, which attaches great importance to the strategic challenges and issues related to drinking water in development and in combating poverty, put its commitments into practice at the highest level with its enactment in 1999 of a code of laws on water and its creation in 2008 of a Ministry of Water. The Ministry's mandate is to promote sustainable and supported development in Madagascar with an approach based on the MDGs, designed to ensure conditions for economic growth and the welfare of the Malagasy people, and to secure access to drinking water and develop sanitation infrastructure.

Similarly, with the chief aim of preventing diseases linked to substandard living conditions, the Ministry of Health's sanitation service and engineering department has established a health and environment service. Various other ministerial departments, such as the ministries for land management and the environment, provide backup efforts in these areas. Our national sanitation policy and strategy, adopted in November 2008, strengthens the Government of Madagascar's legislative and regulatory framework. With the main aim of improving the effectiveness of sanitation and hygiene efforts throughout Madagascar, it is responsible for managing water resources, particularly in protecting water, conserving water resources, protecting the environment, making the best use of water resources, and supplying drinking water and sanitation for domestic waste water.

In order to deal with the omnipresent dangers of disease and other consequences of a lack of drinking water supplies and access to sanitation, we have been able to increase concrete action with the support of various partners and friends to Madagascar among nations, alongside the efforts of our Government. To cite just a few examples, the Diorano-WASH Madagascar initiative — a platform for dialogue and sharing experience that brings together Government bodies, national and international non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral technical and financial partners, regulated by a national Dioran WASH strategy and charter — has enabled us to make great progress in providing the population with drinking water and promulgating good hygiene and sanitary practices. Since 2007, we have also set up hundreds of basic health clinics within the WASH framework that practice an integrated water-sanitation-hygiene approach. We have added a sanitation and safe drinking water primary environment care programme to this initiative, for which we are seeking more partnership support.

Madagascar has deployed considerable efforts, but our country continues to face many challenges in terms of achieving the MDGs. Every year drought affects the southern part of the country, posing a continuing threat to thousands of people, especially children. In 2010, 43 per cent of the population had access to safe drinking water, and 48 per cent of households had access to sanitation. That is far from the goal that the Government has set itself, which is to achieve access to safe drinking water for 63 per cent of the population and to sanitation for 56 per cent by 2015.

Bearing in mind these challenges, which are exacerbated by myriad obstacles, including lack of financing; insufficient capacity in terms of human resources; lack of current data on requirements in the area of sanitation and hygiene; factors related to behaviour change, particularly in rural areas; and cultural factors, our Government is encouraging increased involvement on the part of non-governmental organizations and of civil society in activities relating to the organization, operation and management of water supply installations and sanitation facilities.

The Government of Madagascar calls for a greater mobilization of financial resources so as to enable all peoples of the world, particularly those in the developing countries and in Africa, to fully realize their basic rights to water and to sanitation. Our Government calls also on all Member States to effectively implement the commitments that they have undertaken to ensure that this right becomes reality and does not remain only theoretical.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to warmly thank the organizers of this meeting, Bolivia most of all, and to express our deep satisfaction at this welcome initiative.

In its resolution 64/292, the General Assembly stated that access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. This major advance, along with the proclamation of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life", 2005-2015, definitively placed the issue of water and sanitation high on the agenda of the United Nations.

In that context, my country regularly reiterates its commitment and determination to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly Goal 7 — to reduce by half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water or sanitation services.

That is why access to safe drinking water and to adequate sanitation services, which is a major challenge on the international development agenda, has high priority in terms of our national development policies. In the same vein, Senegal, for several decades, has been implementing a water-supply policy aimed at providing a sufficient quantity and quality of water to various users at the lowest possible cost. That policy has led to an institutional and legislative reform that enhanced the effectiveness of the sector, with a particular focus on improved management and providing the most marginalized sectors of the population with access to water.

Moreover, this mechanism is buttressed by a dynamic private sector and the implementation of a plan of action for the integrated management of water resources. In addition to those efforts, another positive development has taken place: the establishment, in the framework of the Millennium Water and Sanitation Programme (PEPAM), of several hydraulic infrastructures, particularly in poor peri-urban zones and in rural areas. The implementation of the programme has already enabled us to achieve quite striking results. Despite these positive results, which are promising in terms of the achievement of the MDGs in this particular domain, much remains to be done in the area of water quality and delivery, as well as sanitation, especially in rural areas.

With a view to reducing inequalities in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation between urban and rural areas, we have undertaken activities aimed at harnessing surface and run-off water, particularly with respect to catchment areas.

We will not win this fight if we do not take account of climate-related phenomena such as droughts and floods, which can exacerbate constraints on water resources as well as the problem of access to water and sanitation. That is why I call for increased international cooperation and assistance, which are imperative necessities for supporting the activities of developing countries in the implementation of the objectives set in that respect.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate to Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the readiness of the authorities of Senegal to welcome her to our country in the context of the visit she is planning to pay us soon.

Mr. Olhaye (Djibouti): I wish at the outset to commend President Deiss for having facilitated the holding of this meeting at the initiative of Bolivia, joined by more than 20 States, including my own, with the aim of providing a dialogue on the principal challenges related to the realization of the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and their impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, one year after the adoption of resolution 64/292, entitled "The human right to water and sanitation".

The presence at this meeting of His Excellency Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, adds significance to our gathering here today and underscores the high-level political commitment to the issues of water and sanitation by placing them on the international agenda.

The timing of this meeting is also quite significant, as it is taking place against the backdrop of the current severe drought in the Horn of Africa region, which straddles Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, where more than 10 million people are facing severe starvation. It is unfortunate that, despite the early warnings issued and the appeals made over the past six months, the world has been slow to recognize the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe, where resources for clean water, food, shelter and health services have been acutely depleted.

We are only a few years away from the deadline for the commitments made by the international community to achieve fully the Millennium Development Goal of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water or access basic sanitation. Unless, therefore, there is sufficient goodwill on the part of the international community, it is inconceivable that that gap will be bridged, given that almost a billion people lack access to improved water sources and that more than 2.6 billion people do not have access to improved sanitation.

It is quite encouraging, however, that many countries are committing to recognizing access to water and sanitation as human rights and taking, with appropriate political will, both short- and long-term measures to fulfil these goals.

As with everything else, we cannot escape the reality that the world is divided into haves and have-nots when it comes to the full realization of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. But we need to bear in mind that we have an obligation. These differences must give way to rational and concrete political commitments to ensure access to safe drinking water and sanitation for large parts of the population, irrespective of their station in life or where they live.

According to the Independent Expert on human rights, human rights prohibit discrimination against and the exclusion and deprivation of any group or individual, whether living in rural areas, in slums or in poverty. This is why the human rights framework places primary responsibility for the realization of human rights on the State, which should ensure the progressive achievement of universal access and create an overall enabling environment.

My country is one of the most deficient in freshwater resources, and we risk running out of water in the next 25 years. We are one of the countries with the least water available per capita. Out of the 186 countries reviewed for water stress, Djibouti is included among the 17 most at-risk countries in the world, described as being at "extreme risk". For us and other countries in similar situations, the changing patterns of climate change are expected to cause increased drought and flooding. The water shortage situation is predicted to become ever more intense.

With the growth of the world population, an increase in drinking water consumption is inevitable, and, taken together with increased and inefficient irrigation, corruption and poor resource management, the problems of water shortage will be exacerbated. While some water-deficit countries may be endowed with other resources to enable them to invest in desalination plants, build water reservoirs or secure food in other ways, most countries face real challenges for survival.

One year after the adoption of resolution 64/292 on safe drinking water and sanitation, it is gratifying to participate in this meeting to assess the progress achieved within the context of the Millennium Development Goals. We have indeed a long way to go to fully realize the right to drinking water and sanitation, but that prospect should not deter us from striving hard to enable the millions without drinking water or lacking acceptable sanitation conditions to enjoy their human rights.

Mr. Ngculu (South Africa): My delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting on the challenges with regard to the realization of the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

South Africa also wishes to commend the delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and in particular His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma, for their efforts and commitment to ensuring the human right to water and sanitation.

The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution provides a legislative framework for the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the human right to water and sanitation. In addition, the South African Constitution provides for the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights, which derives from the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, especially based on the progressive realization of these rights, including the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

In this regard, our Government has an obligation to create the enabling environment necessary to ensure that all South Africans have access to acceptable levels of water and sanitation. Our Government has established dedicated programmes, policies, criteria and legislation to ensure the realization and enjoyment of the right of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and has committed itself to ensuring access to basic water services since 1994 by creating access to basic water and sanitation to previously disadvantaged people and the victims of racial discrimination.

The comprehensive nature of this right also touches upon other rights, such as the right to adequate housing and an adequate standard of living, and the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. The approach undertaken by the Government of South Africa when dealing with the issue of human settlement is not only about the four walls, but also includes the provision of access to basic services such as basic sanitation, health and water.

Water and environment are catalysts for South Africa's economic growth and development. The role of the Department of Water Affairs, which holds the national mandate on the human right to water and sanitation, is to ensure that the country has enough water and that the environment is protected in order to meet our country's development needs, including the MDGs.

The South African Cabinet further approved the Strategic Framework for Water Services in 2003 and committed itself to the following sanitation targets: all people in South Africa shall have access to a functional basic sanitation facility; all schools shall have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services; all clinics shall have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services; and all bucket toilets shall be eradicated.

South Africa actively works and collaborates with fellow African countries, under the auspices of the African Ministerial Council on Water, in the use and management of water resources for sustainable social and economic development and maintenance of African ecosystems. South Africa also uses the New Partnership for Africa's Development water and sanitation infrastructure programme and the Southern African Development Community water and sanitation programme to further realize the human right to water and sanitation for the African people. In response to the Millennium Development Goals pledge, South Africa has committed itself to implementing a dedicated water services programme. Considering that we are a water-scarce country, South Africa also placed itself at the forefront of progressive water resource management.

We are pleased to announce that South Africa has done well. In terms of achieving the MDG of formal basic water supply, we halved the formal backlog in 2005; and in terms of basic sanitation, the MDG was achieved in 2008. The achievements of the South African Government can be ascribed to specific strategic actions and strong political will and commitment. However, while we acknowledge that great strides have been made in bringing basic services such as water to poor households, many still do not have access to water or have insufficient access.

Important challenges with regard to the realization of the human right to water and sanitation are related to climate change, which is a reality that impacts a great number of people and represents a threat to South Africa's long-term sustainable development, economic growth, quality of life, migration and urbanization.

South Africa remains committed to ensuring that the right to access to water remains sacrosanct, and in this connection we join other delegations in calling on States and international organizations to provide financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer through international assistance and cooperation, in particular to developing countries, in order to scale up efforts to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all, for the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 7 and broader sustainable development goals.

Mr. Körösi (Hungary): Hungary fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Much has been said already by previous speakers, and, obviously, there is a strong convergence among Member States on a broad spectrum of issues, and it encourages me to be very brief and to focus on some points and messages we deem particularly important.

Protection of water resources and integrated, sustainable water management, including sanitation, are key priorities for my country. We are committed to further sharing with our partners our experiences in these fields.

Hungary is of the view that a firm legal basis is of vital importance for successful water management and sanitation at both the national and international levels. Hungary encourages the reinforcement of the international partnership on all water-related issues, also in relation to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference), to be held next year.

Access to clean drinking water and sanitation should be universal, but this is far from a reality today, as hundreds of millions of people around the world continue to suffer, having been deprived of what we deem essential to a decent human life. We believe that it is a right of all that needs to be protected. It requires investments in management institutions, policies and infrastructure throughout vulnerable areas. The devastating humanitarian, economic and social consequences will come at a much higher cost if we do not take preventive measures now.

Mr. Vigny (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The proclamation on 28 July 2010 by the General Assembly, in its resolution 64/292, of the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights was a historic step with respect to the issue of water

Switzerland actively participated in those negotiations and supported the resolution, while highlighting the need for coordination between the work of the General Assembly and that of the Human Rights Council. The resolutions adopted by these two United Nations bodies bring new ethical and qualitative dimensions in terms of physical, economic and non-discriminatory access to services of acceptable quality. Switzerland firmly believes that, in view of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the new goals we need to define for the period following 2015, a human rights-based approach is of the essence.

With that in mind, we welcome the report (A/65/254) submitted by the independent expert, during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, on the importance of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation to the realization of the MDGs, particularly Goal 7.C, which seeks to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population with no access to safe drinking water or basic sanitation services. The benchmarks of the World Health Organization/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, put in place to monitor the achievement of the MDGs related to water and sanitation, must now incorporate these new dimensions.

Switzerland, along with several other countries, supports the Joint Monitoring Programme in this task, which will enable us to monitor the progress made in the area of access to water and sanitation from a human rights perspective. The current situation as described by the Programme reveals major inequalities in terms of access to water and a massive shortfall as concerns sanitation. There is a very wide gap between the needs in the field and the financial resources available. The situation calls for increased financing for drinking water and sanitation by and for low-income countries.

The Water and Sanitation for All Task Force, supported by numerous partners, including Switzerland, seeks to promote dialogue and commitments with respect to this issue at the global level.

At the beginning of this year, the Swiss Parliament agreed to increase our official development assistance. The increase will be devoted primarily to water. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation decided to support the establishment and joint financing of a consortium of Swiss non-governmental organizations that will focus on countries where water and sanitation coverage is extremely sparse, notably in vulnerable countries.

The progress made in terms of recognizing the right to water must be translated into concrete solutions that must be adjusted to scale. That will be a key topic at the forthcoming World Water Forum, to be held in 2012, and will also lie at the heart of the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque, whom I thank for her very detailed, specific and meaningful statement.

The Protocol on Water and Health, ratified and supported by Switzerland, is a good example of a concrete solution. This international instrument, which pertains to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, enshrines the close link that exists between human rights, health, protection of the environment and sustainable development.

In that context, the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and its partners are in the process of elaborating guidelines aimed at taking better account of the various dimensions of the right to water in the framework of projects related to safe drinking water sanitation and to the integrated management of water resources.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I would like first of all to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this important dialogue, and, of course, the Secretary-General and the Special Rapporteur for their comments earlier today. I would also like to thank President Evo Morales and the Plurinational State of Bolivia for having brought this life-sustaining, indeed, life-creating, human need before the General Assembly.

Australians understand something about water. We are the driest inhabited continent on Earth. We have one of the lowest rainfalls, and about three quarters of our land — and there is a lot of it — is arid or semi-arid. Over the past decade we have experienced what scientists estimate to have been our worst drought in 1,000 years.

But of course Australia is a wealthy country, and a developed country; our geology and climate, however, are tough, and our citizens are accustomed to water restrictions in all our major cities as a result of climate change, drought and the degradation of our waterways. Of course, as a developed country that is wealthy, we suffer nothing like the magnitude of the problem so eloquently defined a few minutes ago by the Permanent Representative of Djibouti.

But we do hope that, as a nation, we understand the importance of water to survival and people's livelihoods and the imperative of water and sanitation to people's health, the sustainability of communities — particularly remote and indigenous communities — and the environment. We recognize that access to water and sanitation is fundamental to the realization of human rights, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Other speakers today have spoken eloquently about the figures we confront — more than 2 billion people with no access to basic sanitation — due, in part, to water scarcity but also due, in part, to poor policies and management that have failed to ensure that everyone, regardless of who they are and where they live, can gain access to safe, affordable water and sanitation supplies and services.

The implications for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are clear; we simply cannot attain the MDGs without providing safe water and effective sanitation. Australia is encouraged that the world is on track to meet the MDG 7 target to deliver safe drinking water to hundreds of millions of people, but we are alarmed that the sanitation target is likely to be missed by 1 billion. We must do better.

My own Government has invested over $330 million in water, sanitation and hygiene in developing countries in the past two years, and we are planning to spend another $1 billion in the next four to do much more. Our non-governmental organizations also give priority to water.

Variable rainfall patterns, pollution of water supplies, inefficient use and leakage of water supplies, poor infrastructure, high population growth, rapid urbanization, discrimination and marginalization are all big challenges, which others have spoken about today, to achieving the goal of delivering safe drinking water and sanitation. Addressing those challenges requires enhanced policy and management, increased investments through funding and capacity support, the application of innovative and cost-effective sanitation and water technologies, and an improved focus on the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

We need to improve water and sanitation planning for urban settings and close the gap in the level of access between urban and rural populations. We need to expand rainwater catchment and storage facilities to communities in need, particularly, as I have said, to remote and indigenous communities. We need to empower local communities to enact their own local water and sanitation initiatives.

We need to do more to support integrated water resource management, including safe waste disposal and water-sharing arrangements. And without delay, we need to address the disproportionate impact that poor water and sanitation access has on health, education and economic opportunities for women, young girls and people with disabilities.

To conclude, Australians know that water is a precious resource — the life source — and that it must be carefully managed. We ourselves will continue to give what priority and assistance we can to help meet the challenges that impede access to safe drinking water and sanitation for many hundreds of millions of people. We will continue to participate in vital debates, such as today's, and we would encourage the General Assembly to keep this vital subject on its agenda.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of the Plurinational State of Bolivia for having called for this meeting and President Deiss for rallying to the very just cause of the fundamental right to water and sanitation.

Access to drinking water and sanitation is today a basic human right, as all speakers here have stated. Alas, in today's world, more than 884 million people still lack access to drinking water, while 2.5 billion still lack access to appropriate sanitation facilities, according to a report prepared in 2008 by the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization.

Bearing this situation in mind, the Government of Burkina Faso has set up a State-owned company — the National Water and Sanitation Office — tasked with building, managing and protecting facilities for capturing, transferring, treating and delivering drinking water to meet urban and industrial needs. It also builds, promotes, improves and manages collective, individual and autonomous sanitation facilities for the evacuation of waste water and solid waste in urban and semi-urban areas.

Notable progress made by my country over the past few years in terms of access to drinking water and sanitation led to our being honoured with a Millennium Development Goals Award in September 2010. We would like once again to thank the partners whose support for our Government enabled it to achieve these results.

However, Burkina Faso's efforts to manage water have been limited by rainfall that is inadequate and very unequal across the national territory. This situation led us, in cooperation with the Kingdom of Morocco, in 1998 to launch Operation SAGA, which aims to create artificial rainfall using proven techniques. The experiment was quite successful and is now an ongoing programme.

As a Sahelian country that has suffered from drought, Burkina Faso takes this opportunity to alert the international community to the expansion of the desert and its nefarious consequences. The current dramatic and even tragic situation in the Horn of Africa, and Somalia in particular, gives some idea of those consequences.

We hope that the high-level meeting scheduled for 20 September, on the theme "Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", will be an opportunity for us to address the core of the problem and, in particular, the matter of access to drinking water and appropriate sanitation facilities.

Lack of access to water and sanitation has serious consequences for education, housing, work, gender parity and life in general. It is thus very urgent to identify appropriate and sustainable solutions to this problem, whose causes and consequences are many and complex. Nevertheless, through concerted and inclusive efforts, the Member States, with the assistance of the United Nations system and other stakeholders, will be able to create, in our opinion, the conditions conducive to guaranteeing access to safe drinking water and sanitation to populations that still lack them.

Ms. Hussain (Maldives): The Maldives welcomes the convening of this very important debate on the right to water and sanitation. We thank the President for his leadership in initiating this important discussion.

The Maldives has a policy towards ensuring that all inhabited islands have access to clean water. Water is very scarce and extremely expensive for us to manage due to the geological formation and geography of the Maldives archipelago. There are no rivers or streams. The few small wetlands or freshwater lakes that we have yet to be managed. Our main freshwater resource is groundwater in the form of a thin freshwater lens found in very shallow depths. It is therefore highly susceptible to saline intrusion and contamination due to sanitation processes and needs intensive management, which is often extremely involved and expensive, to avoid overexploitation. Our lesson is that the health benefits and social impacts of this effort far outweigh the expense.

The Maldives is deeply concerned that, according to the 2010 Joint Monitoring Programme report of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, approximately 884 million people lack access to improved water sources and that over 2.6 billion people do not have access to sanitation. We are very alarmed that approximately 1.5 million children under the age of five die and that 443 million school days are lost every day as a result of water- and sanitation-related diseases. Urgent and transformational action is needed now to combat these global issues.

There is no doubt that water is a scarce commodity all over the globe. It is even more so for countries like the Maldives, which are highly vulnerable to climate change, adding further pressure to existing threats to the sustainability of our freshwater resources. For small island States like the Maldives, the impact of climate change on our water resources is not a distant reality but an acute problem that we are faced with in the present. Our commitment to contributing to resolve this most critical of issues is directly related to the well-being and socio-economic development of our people.

The Maldives welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292 and Human Rights Council resolution 15/9, which recognize the human right to water and sanitation and reaffirm, inter alia, that the human right to water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living and inextricably linked to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as well as the right to life and human dignity.

We reaffirm that the human right to water and sanitation is set out in existing human rights treaties and therefore entails legally binding obligations. The Maldives has long been engaged in taking measures to protect and ensure the right to water. Our national policy is to ensure that all inhabited islands have adequate water and sanitation services.

We acknowledge that right and have put plans in place to enhance the management of our water resources in order to combat the impact of climate change and sea-level rise. The Maldives believes that existing measures to ensure the right to water must be evaluated further in order to determine their sustainability in the context of sea-level rise, the increased frequency of extreme weather events and changes in precipitation levels.

We consider that the recognition of the human right to water and sanitation is a breakthrough that demonstrates the political will and determined aspiration of the international community's to resolve this important issue.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the President of the General Assembly for having organized this important meeting on the critical issue of the right to water and sanitation, which is a major challenge to the international community. It is at the heart of the realization of the economic and social rights that Morocco holds dear. We are delighted to learn that Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque has been tasked to advocate this right, which she is doing with great commitment and professionalism.

We all know that the increasingly numerous calls for the recognition and realization of the right to water are legitimate and essential to the full and effective exercise of human rights. No life is possible or conceivable without access to water. This claim is not political, ideological or moral. It is a solemn appeal in favour of the right to life. By enshrining the right to water in international norms, are we not simply helping to protect life? Is that not the raison d'être of the United Nations system? Can we legitimately accept that millions of women, men and children, mostly in developing countries, are deprived of sufficient access to water for economic, geographic or environmental reasons? Is that our understanding of respect for human dignity? Is it acceptable that, in Africa and Asia, the average distance that a woman or a child must walk in order to find water is six kilometres?

I am proud of having personally experienced that trial and of having lived in very difficult circumstances. When I talk about the right to water, I know what I am talking about.

According to the World Health Organization, half of all hospital beds across the world are occupied by patients suffering from waterborne diseases. According to the United Nations Development Programme, the lack of access to drinking water and sanitation has grave consequences for the right to health. Every year, 1.8 million children die of diseases caused by unsafe water and poor hygiene; that figure is far higher than the number of deaths caused by violent conflict. Four people out of every 10 in the developing world are affected by water shortages. The situation is deteriorating because of demographic growth, urban sprawl, pollution and the impact of climate change.

Should the international community resign itself to this sorrowful assessment? We hope not. The time has come for us to come to our senses, appeal to people's consciences and mobilize the search for sustainable solutions. The organization of this meeting is already, in and of itself, a form of recognition of the gravity of the situation and a call to action. We must not stop at words but act together, and quickly.

I cannot but regret the fact that this debate, which is so important to the lives of millions of people across the planet, is taking place in a General Assembly Hall that is practically empty. That does not herald any deep or massive commitment on the part of the international community to this fundamental right.

Morocco is a willing and energetic participant in this new collective awareness-raising. My country supports any international effort to give full recognition to the universal right to water and sanitation. Morocco welcomed the adoption of resolution 64/292 in July 2010.

My country's commitment to recognizing the right to water is not new. Since winning its independence, Morocco has made access to water a priority. In the 1960s, we launched a dam construction programme that has enabled us to increase our storage capacity to 17 billion cubic metres. Almost all of our urban population in Morocco has access to drinking water; in rural areas, 60 per cent have such access. The construction of hundreds of water purification plants in small and medium-sized Moroccan towns has led to great achievements in terms of wastewater treatment.

The modernization of the legislative and administrative framework has allowed for changes to water resource management by increasing supply through demand management and resource protection. In October 2009, His Majesty Mohammed VI declared that

> "our present and future challenge is to work tirelessly to master our resources, where economy in their use, the maximization of their value, expediency in their organization and preservation of their quality will be the basis of our development methods".

At the regional and international levels, my country has always stood shoulder to shoulder with countries facing economic, social and human difficulties linked to access to water. In the context of active, voluntary and dynamic South-South cooperation characterized by exchanges of experience, Morocco has provided assistance to brother countries, in particular in Africa, such as on artificial rainfall. My country has also been very aware of the situation of countries affected by climate change, in particular island countries, and by drought, as is unfortunately currently the case in the Horn of Africa.

Only international joint action will enable future generations to have adequate access to water. However, how can we not be concerned when the United Nations declares that by 2025, two-thirds of the global population, or 5.5 billion people, could live in areas affected by moderate or serious water stress. In Africa, 25 per cent of the population is already in a situation of extreme water stress. The drought-driven exodus from the Horn of Africa fully justifies today's debate. Respect for human dignity begins with the enshrinement of the universal right to water. It is time to unite and to act, since our prime responsibility in this body is, above all, to help save lives by ensuring access to the source of all life on Earth. I would say that water is essential to all life on Earth.

When I commented on the fact that this debate is taking place before an almost empty Assembly Hall, it was not to single anybody out, but only to deplore the fact that such a basic, fundamental and seminal human right can be addressed with, I will not say indifference, but little enthusiasm.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank the President for having convened this plenary. Allow me, through him, to welcome the participation of His Excellency the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, our companion and brother Evo Morales Ayma, in this afternoon's debate.

The reports of United Nations agencies and bodies indicate that access to water and sanitation is unequal across the world. They reveal the existing polarities among regions and countries with regard to the enjoyment of such rights. Access to water and sanitation is a human right that must be ensured for all men and women on Earth. The fact that a wealthy minority monopolizes the benefits and enjoyment of the gifts of Mother Earth, while almost a billion people lack access to drinking water, is to be condemned. Some 2.6 billion people lack acceptable sanitation facilities, while that same minority flaunts the obscene extravagances that they enjoy in the contrived and alienating capitalist market.

Every day, between 4,000 and 5,000 children die as a result of lack of access to drinking water. The root causes can be found in poverty, economic and social inequality, climate change, the destruction of natural resources and the unfair balance of power that characterize the global capitalist system.

Will humankind be able to reverse such destructive trends, which annihilate life, and to create a more democratic, just and pluralistic society conducive to the preservation of life? We believe that that is possible. In order to ensure that humankind can exercise fundamental human rights, including access to water and sanitation, and achieve its freedom, we must uproot the narrow and miserly foundation of economic competition and market fundamentalism and make way for the reign of world solidarity.

In Venezuela, the human right to water and sanitation is ensured. Our country has a legal provision that recognizes the nation's full sovereignty over water, that access to water is a fundamental right and that water is vital to life and human well-being and an essential resource for development.

This afternoon, His Excellency President Evo Morales Ayma said that water is the mother of all rights. We hear him. If that right is not upheld, no human right will be respected. I would add that water delivery must be a public service, not a source of wealth and trade. He called on us to seek a balance between human beings and nature. We fully share such humanist principles.

Venezuela's water-related legislation establishes that water is a social good. Therefore, the State ensures access to water to all communities, urban and rural, including indigenous peoples and all vulnerable social groups. The law also guarantees that, in full exercise of sovereignty and national security, foreign companies can never be allowed to exploit any water source anywhere. Water is a public good. It cannot be privately owned by any natural or legal person.

The United Nations established a Millennium Development Goal aimed at halving the percentage of people without sustainable access to drinking water by 2015. Venezuela achieved the Goal of drinking water coverage in 2001 by building networks to reduce to 15 per cent the number of people without drinking water. The goal of sanitation service coverage was reached in 2005 by building networks to reduce the number of people without sanitation services.

More than 95 per cent of the population of Venezuela today has access to drinking water. Our country, in the context of the Bolivarian revolution, has established major infrastructures for the capture, harnessing, purification and supply of drinking water, resulting in a total production capacity that can provide enough water for the 30 million people living in Venezuela. Our country also met the sanitation objective, achieving coverage of 92 per cent by means of our national plan aimed at expanding access to drinking water and sanitation.

Allow me to conclude by voicing my country's hope that the contributions made by the various delegations that have spoken in this debate will serve as an incentive to ensure that the right to water and sanitation can be enjoyed by all human beings on this planet.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.